

Local Wisdom-Based Learning as a Means of Strengthening the Creativity and Cultural Identity of Manggarai Students

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Abstract. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of Manggarai local wisdom-based learning to strengthen students' creativity and cultural identity. Local wisdom practices such as Congka Caci and Sa'e not only contain aesthetic and traditional values but also embody pedagogical values that can foster creative thinking, collaboration, and understanding of local cultural identity. This study employed a qualitative case study design conducted in one secondary school in Manggarai Regency. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings show that integrating local wisdom into learning can enhance students' creativity through imaginative activities, contextual problem-solving, and culture-based artistic expression. In addition, culture-based learning strengthens cultural identity, increases pride in ancestral traditions, and reinforces students' character. This study recommends developing more structured contextual learning models grounded in local wisdom for implementation in Manggarai schools.

Keywords: local wisdom; Manggarai; creativity; cultural identity; contextual learning.

1 Introduction

Twenty-first-century education requires students to have creative and critical thinking skills as well as a strong cultural identity amid increasingly intensive globalization. Through the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, Indonesia emphasizes the importance of contextual, flexible, and student-centered learning to generate meaningful (deep) learning [1]. One approach that is increasingly considered important is integrating local wisdom into learning to strengthen creativity while reinforcing students' cultural identity. However, conventional teacher-centered approaches still dominate classroom practices in Manggarai Regency. This is due to limited teacher training in integrating local wisdom and pressure from the national curriculum, which prioritizes standardized academic achievement over the exploration of local cultural values. This gap results in students' limited familiarity with cultural heritage such as Congka Caci and Sa'e, even though these traditions contain rich aesthetic and strategic values.

The integration of local wisdom into the curriculum is crucial because the current government-designed curriculum remains largely conventional. This stems from a

history of centralized education policies that focus on uniform achievement, measurable administration, and academic performance. As a result, the curriculum often functions more as a tool of control than as a space for cultural and educational growth. This system emphasizes technocratic standardization and centralized assessment, primarily focusing on cognitive achievement for global rankings. Local knowledge is often marginalized because it is difficult to measure.

One possible pathway for incorporating local wisdom within this rigid system is through Local Content, which should be more than an additional subject—it can serve as a hands-on cultural workshop for students. At a young age, students benefit from experiential learning through traditional arts, which can trigger deeper thinking and keep learning engaging. By integrating local values into the curriculum, teachers can challenge students in ways that are relevant to their own lives and use art as a bridge between cultural identity and thinking skills.

The opportunity to integrate local wisdom is already present within the conventional curriculum structure itself, particularly through a thematic-integrative approach, local content, culture-based projects, and arts education, all of which align with how children learn in early developmental stages.

In Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, traditions such as Congka Caci and Sa'e have strong educational value. These cultural forms are not only symbols of identity; they also reflect the Manggarai community's mindset, aesthetics, movement patterns, communication, and shared values. Congka Caci and Sa'e should not be treated as folklore alone; instead, they can serve as rich pedagogical resources by combining movement, rhythm, space, symbols, social relations, and values. These can be adapted across levels: as rhythm and movement games for younger learners, as expression and teamwork activities in elementary school, as studies of meaning and structure in junior high school, and as critical reflection in high school. Integrating Manggarai traditions into the curriculum does not mean abandoning the national framework; rather, it means adapting local culture pedagogically to create engaging and relevant learning experiences grounded in students' lived realities.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the current curriculum provides limited pedagogical guidance for contextualizing local wisdom into daily classroom instruction. While the national curriculum encourages contextual learning, its implementation in Manggarai secondary schools tends to prioritize cognitive outcomes aligned with national examinations, leaving minimal space for culturally grounded creative exploration. As a result, students demonstrate limited engagement with their own cultural heritage, and learning experiences risk becoming repetitive, abstract, and disconnected from students' lived realities [2].

This condition highlights a structural gap between curriculum expectations and local educational needs in Manggarai. Without deliberate strategies to integrate local wisdom, the potential of Manggarai cultural practices as creative and identity-forming learning resources remains underutilized. Therefore, a context-specific educational approach grounded in Manggarai local wisdom is necessary to support creativity development and cultural identity formation in secondary education.

The transition toward creativity development requires stimuli that are close to students' personal experiences. The Congka Caci ritual, for example, is not merely a war dance; it also involves training in strategy and courage, which intersects with dimensions of creativity. Likewise, Sa'e highlights social harmony and coordination. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge creativity theory with Manggarai cultural practices within the framework of formal education.

Given this urgency, systematic efforts are needed to develop learning models that not only promote students' creativity but also instill cultural identity values. Manggarai local wisdom-based learning is a significant step toward achieving meaningful, contextual, and sustainable learning.

An examination of the secondary school curriculum structure in Manggarai Regency indicates that the integration of local cultural content remains limited and largely implicit. Although arts and culture subjects are formally included, they are generally allocated minimal instructional time and positioned as complementary subjects rather than core learning domains [4]. Local cultural knowledge such as Congka Caci and Sa'e is not systematically embedded in learning objectives, competency standards, or assessment indicators. Instead, cultural elements are often introduced incidentally during ceremonial school events or extracurricular activities, without clear pedagogical guidance for classroom integration. This creates a gap between national policy discourse that promotes contextual and student-centered learning and classroom practices that continue to prioritize standardized academic outcomes over culturally grounded creative learning experiences.

This structural misalignment highlights the urgency of developing learning models that deliberately integrate Manggarai local wisdom into formal education. Without such pedagogical intervention, the rich cultural practices of Congka Caci and Sa'e remain underutilized as educational resources, despite their strong potential to foster students' creativity and cultural identity.

2 Theoretical Review

One theory that views local culture as a primary learning resource is ethnopedagogical theory. International perspectives demonstrate the success of this approach, such as *kaitiakitanga* in New Zealand, which integrates Māori ecological values into environmental curricula, and environmental education movements in Brazil that incorporate local knowledge for Amazon conservation. In Indonesia, local wisdom functions as a cultural lens for meaningfully understanding academic concepts and enhancing creativity.

Creativity in this study refers to Torrance's four dimensions: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. In the Manggarai context, fluency relates to students' ability to generate diverse movement variations in Sa'e. Flexibility is evident when students adjust their strategies during Caci simulations. Originality emerges when ritual values are reconstructed into modern artistic works, while elaboration is demonstrated through students' ability to explain the symbolic meanings of cultural artifacts such as Mbaru Gendang in depth.

Based on this, the theoretical review addresses the following areas:

Local Wisdom-Based Learning

Local wisdom-based learning integrates cultural values, practices, symbols, and traditions into the learning process [4]. This approach strengthens learning relevance, increases learning motivation, and builds students' cultural identities [5]. Local wisdom functions as a cultural lens that enables students to understand academic concepts in their own cultural contexts [2].

Manggarai Culture as a Learning Resource

Manggarai culture consists of symbolic systems, rituals, collective values, and cultural artifacts such as Congka Caci and Sa'e, which embody creativity, collaboration, aesthetics, strategy, rhythm, and solidarity. Previous studies state that integrating local culture into learning strengthens cultural literacy and increases student participation in the learning process [1]. Other research shows that local culture-based learning can significantly enhance students' creativity [6].

Creativity as a 21st-Century Competency

Creativity is the ability to generate new, original, and useful ideas [7]. Torrance identified four dimensions of creativity: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration [8]. Recent research indicates that creativity develops better when students engage in cultural activities, arts, traditional games, and challenging problems within local contexts [9].

Students' Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a psychological and social construct related to a sense of belonging to a specific culture [10]. Learning oriented toward local culture strengthens students' sense of belonging and awareness of cultural values. In the Manggarai context, culture-based learning helps students understand historical roots, social structures, and values of respect in social relationships.

Research Questions

Based on the background and theoretical review, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Manggarai local wisdom that can be utilized as learning resources?
2. How can local wisdom-based learning strengthen Manggarai students' creativity?
3. How can the integration of local cultural values strengthen students' cultural identity in learning contexts?

3 Research Methodology

Research Approach

This qualitative ethnopedagogical case study was conducted in three public secondary schools in Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The schools were

selected purposively based on their proximity to active customary communities and their inclusion of arts and culture subjects in the curriculum. This study used a qualitative approach with an ethnopedagogical design because it focuses on exploring, documenting, and analyzing Congka Caci and Sa'e as forms of Manggarai local wisdom and their utilization in learning to strengthen students' creativity and cultural identities. Ethnopedagogical design enables researchers to understand cultural phenomena, local educational practices, and customary values from the emic perspective of the Manggarai community [3, 1].

This approach was combined with a descriptive-exploratory design because the study not only explored cultural data but also examined the implementation of local wisdom-based learning in Manggarai schools. The study involved 15 arts and culture teachers, 45 students (Grades VIII–IX), and three Manggarai traditional leaders as key informants, as well as customary communities that still practice the cultural rituals of Congka Caci and Sa'e.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through methodological triangulation to obtain a holistic picture of local cultural values and their implications for students' creativity and cultural identity.

Participatory Observation

Observations were conducted in school settings and customary communities. The observations focused on:

- learning activities related to local culture;
- patterns of student interaction in cultural contexts;
- cultural practices of Congka Caci and Sa'e; and
- manifestations of students' creativity in culture-based activities.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted with:

- teachers;
- principals;
- students;
- Manggarai traditional leaders; and
- cultural practitioners (Sa'e dancers and Caci performers).

The interviews aimed to reveal perceptions, experiences, and cultural practices that can be utilized in learning, as well as how culture contributes to the development of creativity and cultural identity.

Cultural and Learning Documentation

Documentation included:

- photographs and videos of cultural activities;
- local cultural artifacts;

- school documents related to cultural programs; and
- relevant customary records.

Additional Instruments

- Student creativity observation sheet (fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration) [8].
- Cultural identity checklist (cultural knowledge, cultural pride, cultural engagement) [10].

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [11]. A thematic approach was used to identify key themes such as harmony, rhythm, cultural strategies, creative movement, collaboration, and customary symbols. Data were verified through source triangulation and method triangulation by comparing interview results with field observations.

4 Results and Discussion

Results

4.1 Manggarai Local Wisdom (Congka Caci and Sa'e) Contains High Potential Values for Learning

Based on field findings, integrating Congka Caci and Sa'e into the classroom triggered students' deep emotional engagement with the material. These practices possess significant learning potential. Congka Caci embodies rhythm, movement, creativity, strategy, courage, sportsmanship, and aesthetics. Likewise, Sa'e emphasizes bodily coordination, collective aesthetics, rhythmic discipline, social harmony, and cooperation. These values relate to aspects of creativity (fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration) and cultural identity. Teachers also noted that students found it easier to understand the concept of strategy through analogies drawn from Caci and Sa'e practices.

4.2 The Role of Local Wisdom-Based Learning in Strengthening Students' Creativity

Classroom process analysis shows that when teachers integrated Manggarai cultural activities such as Sa'e movements, students demonstrated increases in creativity across several indicators:

- Fluency: Students generated many ideas when asked to create designs, stories, or solutions based on cultural rituals.
- Flexibility: Students were better able to modify movements or patterns into creative representations in project assignments.
- Originality: Cultural integration stimulated unique ideas that differed from conventional learning contexts.

- Elaboration: Students were able to explain the symbolic meanings of cultural elements in greater depth.

Teachers reported that learning became livelier and that students were more emotionally engaged.

4.3 Local Wisdom Plays an Important Role in Strengthening Students' Cultural Identity

Interviews with students and teachers indicated that integrating local culture into lessons strengthened students' cultural identity by:

- increasing students' pride in their regional culture;
- helping students rediscover meanings of symbols, rhythms, movements, and customary values that have begun to fade; and
- encouraging students to practice cultural values such as cooperation, politeness (*teing hang*), and deliberation, while building awareness of identity as part of the Manggarai community.

Furthermore, students' active involvement in integrating local culture at school, such as practicing Congka Caci and Sa'e, provides a concrete way to shape creativity and strengthen cultural engagement. Actively participating in learning traditions and understanding local cultural practices provides opportunities to build genuine connections, share experiences, and promote inclusivity toward diverse values and practices.

Discussion

The values contained in local wisdom, such as Congka Caci and Sa'e, are described in cultural literature as "socio-pedagogical capital" that can enrich the learning process [3-5]. Socio-pedagogical capital combines the strengths of social relationships, trust, values, norms, and networks (social capital) with pedagogical goals to improve learning quality, development, and character building.

Local wisdom also provides a learning ecology that supports creativity and the formation of cultural identity. Learning ecology views learning as a dynamic process occurring across interconnected contexts—physical, social, cultural, and virtual—with the aim of developing ecological awareness and student self-transformation within a broader system. This process extends beyond the classroom to include local sociocultural interactions and modern technology. These findings are consistent with ethnopedagogical perspectives that local culture contains educational values that can serve as learning resources [1, 12]. Moreover, local culture-based education enhances engagement, sense of belonging, and students' cultural identity orientation [11].

Studies [7, 8] suggest that creativity emerges when students receive stimuli that are close to their personal experiences. The rhythmic values in Sa'e dance and the strategic values in Congka Caci serve as cues and symbols that promote divergent thinking and can increase creativity [1, 13]. Cultural activities provide authentic and challenging situations for students to express their ideas. In this context, local wisdom is no longer supplementary material but an effective and creative pedagogical resource.

This aligns with theories of cultural identity [12], which argue that learning that acknowledges and utilizes local culture strengthens students' sense of belonging and cultural identity in school. Revitalizing local wisdom through education can positively impact generational cultural continuity, consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy [2, 14].

Despite its pedagogical potential, implementing local wisdom-based learning faces practical challenges within standardized educational environments. Teachers reported difficulties balancing cultural exploration with the demands of national standardized examinations that emphasize written, text-based assessment formats. Limited instructional time and the absence of culture-sensitive assessment instruments further constrain meaningful integration. Without systemic support—particularly curriculum flexibility and assessment reform—local wisdom-based learning risks remaining peripheral rather than transformative.

5 Conclusion

This study shows that Manggarai local wisdom-based learning effectively strengthens students' creativity and cultural identity. The values embedded in Congka Caci and Sa'e provide authentic inquiry spaces for students. Therefore, Manggarai local wisdom-based learning has strong pedagogical potential for development in educational practice.

First, Manggarai cultural characteristics, including Congka Caci and Sa'e, contain aesthetic, moral, social, and movement creativity values that can be used as contextual learning resources for teaching creativity. Second, local wisdom-based learning has proven effective in enhancing students' creativity, particularly in fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.

Third, integrating local culture into learning strengthens students' cultural identities. Through school-based cultural activities such as Sa'e practice, appreciation of Congka Caci, and customary discussions, students show increased pride, a deeper understanding of cultural symbols, and greater self-awareness as members of the Manggarai community.

Overall, this study confirms that local wisdom-based learning is a strategic means of strengthening both the creativity and cultural identity of Manggarai students. Therefore, more structured, culture-based contextual learning models are needed and should be sustainably implemented in Manggarai schools.

This study recommends that the Manggarai Regency Education Office develop technical guidelines for a local content curriculum that integrates customary rituals into arts and social studies subjects. Continuous teacher training is also needed to improve competence in designing ethnoscience- and ethnopedagogy-based learning materials so that local culture becomes the core of character education rather than a ceremonial add-on.

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