

Integrating Local Values into Curriculum Design: A Critical Educational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the integration of local values into curriculum design at SMP X in Jayapura, Papua. A qualitative case study was conducted during one academic semester involving ten informants consisting of one principal, four teachers, four students, and one indigenous community leader. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis, then analyzed thematically. The novelty of this study lies in identifying symbolic, contextual, and substantive levels of local value integration. The findings show that local values were mainly presented through cultural activities and local examples, while their inclusion in learning objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment remained limited. The study highlights the need for systematic collaboration between schools and indigenous communities in developing culturally responsive curricula.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is not merely a formal arrangement of subjects but also a mechanism through which particular knowledge, identities, and cultural perspectives are recognized. In culturally diverse societies, a curriculum that relies mainly on dominant knowledge may create distance between school learning and students' social realities. This concern is particularly relevant in Papua, where students live within communities that maintain distinctive languages, traditions, environmental knowledge, social relationships, and customary values. Integrating these cultural resources into curriculum design can make learning more meaningful while supporting students' connection to their communities. Indigenous knowledge should therefore be treated as a living knowledge system that contributes to cultural continuity, environmental understanding, and socially responsible education rather than as an additional cultural topic (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

The integration of local values is also closely connected to educational equity. Culturally responsive education positions students' cultural experiences, community knowledge, and ways of understanding the world as legitimate learning resources. Such an approach challenges deficit perspectives that judge Indigenous learners only through standardized outcomes without considering the cultural relevance of schooling. Bishop and Vass (2021) explain that culturally responsive schooling can address educational inequality when cultural responsiveness is embedded in teaching, professional learning, curriculum, and school policy. However, the inclusion of local culture must extend beyond festivals, traditional clothing, performances, and ceremonial activities. A culturally responsive curriculum should influence what students learn, how knowledge is taught, whose voices are represented, and how learning is assessed.

Previous studies have demonstrated the educational importance of connecting curriculum content with Indigenous learners' cultural contexts. Chen (2023) found that teachers could strengthen students' learning and cultural competence by connecting classroom themes with family experiences, community practices, natural environments, and locally available materials. The study also showed that teachers need to reflect critically on whether learning materials and teaching approaches are appropriate for Indigenous students. Nevertheless, the research focused mainly on teacher practices in Indigenous preschool settings in Taiwan. It did not examine how local values are institutionalized across curriculum objectives, teaching strategies, learning materials, and assessment at the junior secondary school level. This limitation indicates the need for context-specific research that examines curriculum design as a complete and interconnected educational process.

Research also indicates that teachers frequently experience structural and professional difficulties when incorporating Indigenous knowledge into formal education. Photo and McKnight (2024) found considerable differences in teachers' familiarity with Indigenous knowledge and identified limited practical strategies for its classroom integration. Although their study proposed preliminary guidelines, its focus was specifically on science classrooms in South Africa. Riley et al. (2024) further emphasized that Indigenous content must be

integrated ethically by listening to Indigenous voices and strengthening teachers' confidence rather than allowing educators to interpret community knowledge independently. These findings suggest that curriculum localization requires both teacher competence and meaningful community authority. However, limited attention has been given to how school leaders, teachers, students, and Indigenous community representatives negotiate the selection and representation of local values within one school curriculum.

Another research gap concerns the difference between the visible presence of culture and its substantive influence on curriculum design. Local cultural elements may appear in school events or classroom examples without changing learning objectives, pedagogical relationships, or assessment practices. Lembit and Burgess (2024) found that teachers faced structural constraints when developing culturally responsive curricula and argued that Indigenous worldviews should be embedded in the structure and values of written curricula. Similarly, Burgess et al. (2022) showed that community-led and place-based relationships are necessary for developing curriculum narratives that respect Indigenous knowledge and cultural authority. These studies provide important conceptual foundations, but they do not classify the depth of local value integration in a way that can be applied to a junior secondary school in Papua. The present study therefore distinguishes integration into symbolic, contextual, and substantive levels to examine whether local values function as cultural displays, contextual learning resources, or foundations of curriculum design.

Based on these concerns, this study aims to critically examine how local values are selected, represented, and integrated into curriculum design at SMP X in Jayapura, Papua. It investigates their presence in learning objectives, instructional materials, teaching strategies, classroom activities, and assessment practices. The study also examines the roles of the principal, teachers, students, and an Indigenous community leader in determining the meaning and educational relevance of local values. Its theoretical contribution lies in proposing a three-level framework of symbolic, contextual, and substantive integration that extends critical and culturally responsive curriculum perspectives. Its practical contribution is to provide schools with a basis for evaluating whether the inclusion of local culture is meaningful, systematic, and supported by community participation. Accordingly, the study seeks to explain how local values are integrated into the curriculum, what forms of integration are evident, and how collaboration between the school and Indigenous community can strengthen culturally responsive curriculum development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Values and Indigenous Knowledge in Curriculum Design

Local values represent collective principles, knowledge, practices, languages, and relationships developed by communities through their historical interaction with social and natural environments. Within curriculum design, these values should not be treated merely as supplementary cultural content but as legitimate sources for determining learning objectives, materials, teaching activities, and educational meaning. The systematic review by da Silva et al. (2024) shows that integrating Indigenous knowledge into schools can improve cultural relevance, strengthen connections between education and community life, and support the continuity of local knowledge. However, the review also identifies fragmented implementation, limited teacher preparation, and weak institutional support across many educational contexts. These findings support the present study because they indicate the need to examine not only whether local knowledge is included, but also how deeply it influences curriculum components. Research in Jayapura is therefore important for understanding how Papuan local values are translated from community knowledge into formal curriculum design.

Critical and Culturally Sustaining Education

Critical education views curriculum as a social and political construction that determines which knowledge, identities, and cultural experiences are recognized within schooling. Culturally sustaining education extends this perspective by requiring schools to maintain and revitalize students' cultural and linguistic resources rather than merely accommodating cultural differences. Ladson-Billings (2021) argues that culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies should strengthen academic learning while enabling students to understand social inequality and preserve their cultural identities. McCarty and Brayboy (2021) further explain that Indigenous education must support cultural revitalization and critically address power, privilege, and the historical marginalization of Indigenous knowledge. These perspectives support the present research because they provide a theoretical basis for evaluating whether local values are meaningfully embedded or simply displayed in school activities. Applying this critical perspective at SMP X enables the study to assess the educational authority given to local Papuan knowledge within curriculum development.

Levels of Local Value Integration

The integration of local values may occur at different levels of curriculum practice. Symbolic integration appears when culture is represented through traditional clothing, ceremonies, performances, or commemorative events without influencing the core curriculum. Contextual integration occurs when teachers use local examples, stories, environments, and community experiences to explain formal subject content. Substantive integration is achieved when local values influence learning objectives, teaching strategies, classroom relationships, learning materials, and assessment. Research involving Indigenous students indicates that minimal cultural inclusion should be distinguished from school programs developed collaboratively with community members and cultural knowledge holders (Prehn et al., 2025). Their findings show that many

Indigenous students still perceive insufficient support for their cultural identities and expect schools to provide greater cultural recognition, activities, and encouragement. This study extends that concern by using symbolic, contextual, and substantive categories to identify the depth of local value integration in a Papuan junior secondary curriculum.

Teacher Capacity and Indigenous Community Participation

Teachers play a central role in interpreting curriculum policy and transforming local values into learning practices. Their willingness and capacity to teach Indigenous knowledge depend on their understanding of the community, curriculum competence, reflective awareness, collaboration, and access to cultural mentorship. Bostwick et al. (2025) identify five important dimensions of culturally responsive teaching, namely understanding community, curriculum work, reflexive discussion, collaborative teaching, and learning through cultural mentorship. The framework demonstrates that culturally responsive teaching cannot rely solely on individual teacher motivation because it also requires relationships with Indigenous students and communities. Community participation is particularly important because local knowledge may contain cultural meanings, ownership rules, and ethical boundaries that teachers cannot determine independently. This previous study supports the involvement of an Indigenous community leader in the current research and strengthens the argument that curriculum integration should be collaboratively validated rather than designed only by school personnel.

Culturally Responsive Assessment and Curriculum Coherence

Meaningful integration of local values requires consistency between curriculum objectives, classroom instruction, and assessment. A curriculum cannot be considered substantively responsive when local culture appears in learning activities but students are evaluated only through culturally disconnected tasks and standardized indicators. Kerr and Averill (2024) explain that culturally sustaining assessment should consider learner wellbeing, aspirations, teacher positioning, supportive learning environments, and purposeful dialogue. Their study also emphasizes the importance of cultural knowledge, professional learning, and policy support in creating equitable assessment for Indigenous learners. These findings support the present research by showing that assessment is an essential indicator for distinguishing contextual from substantive curriculum integration. Examining teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment instruments at SMP X is therefore necessary to determine whether local values form a coherent part of curriculum design or remain limited to classroom illustrations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a critical case study design. The design was selected to examine how local values were selected, interpreted, represented, and integrated into curriculum design within the natural setting of one junior secondary school. The school was treated as a bounded case because the investigation focused on its curriculum documents, teaching practices, assessment procedures, and relationships with the local Indigenous community during one academic semester. A critical perspective was applied to identify whose knowledge was represented, who participated in curriculum decisions, and whether local values were integrated symbolically, contextually, or substantively. The study did not test statistical relationships because its primary concern was the meaning, process, depth, and authority underlying local value integration.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at SMP X in Jayapura, Papua, Indonesia. The school name was anonymized to protect institutional and participant confidentiality. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in curriculum planning, classroom implementation, learning experiences, or the preservation of local knowledge. Ten informants participated, consisting of one school principal, four teachers, four eighth-grade students, and one Indigenous community leader. The principal was required to have responsibility for curriculum policy, while the teachers had to have taught at the school for at least two years and developed or implemented teaching modules. The students were selected from the eighth grade, had attended the school for at least one academic year, and had experienced learning activities containing local cultural elements. The Indigenous community leader was required to possess recognized knowledge of local values, traditions, and community educational expectations. This focused sample was considered adequate because each participant group provided specific and complementary information about the same bounded case.

Data Sources and Research Instruments

The study used primary and secondary qualitative data. Primary data consisted of participants' explanations, experiences, perceptions, and interpretations obtained through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and a focus group discussion with students. Secondary data included the school operational curriculum, teaching modules, lesson materials, student worksheets, assessment instruments, school program records, photographs of cultural activities, and other relevant institutional documents. The interview guide explored the identification of local values, curriculum decision-making, classroom implementation, community involvement, teacher competence, student experiences, and implementation barriers. The observation guide recorded the use of local language, stories, environmental knowledge, community examples, teaching strategies, student participation, and assessment practices. The document analysis matrix examined the presence of local values in learning objectives, content, instructional activities, learning resources, and

assessment. All instruments were developed from the research questions and the conceptual categories of symbolic, contextual, and substantive integration.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted during one academic semester. The initial stage involved obtaining institutional permission, explaining the study to participants, securing informed consent, and assigning identification codes to protect personal identities. The researcher then reviewed curriculum documents to identify preliminary evidence of local value integration and used the results to refine the interview and observation focus. Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and Indigenous community leader, while students participated in individual interviews and one focused group discussion. Classroom observations were carried out in lessons that potentially incorporated local cultural content, and field notes were written immediately after each session. Interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued through an iterative process in which interview findings were compared with observations and documentary evidence.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis involved familiarization with transcripts and field notes, generation of initial codes, construction of preliminary themes, review of thematic relationships, definition of final themes, and preparation of an interpretive account. This procedure allowed explicit statements and underlying meanings concerning curriculum authority, cultural representation, community participation, and instructional practice to be examined systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Initial coding was primarily inductive, while the final interpretation also used symbolic, contextual, and substantive integration as analytical categories. Symbolic integration referred to ceremonial or visible cultural representation, contextual integration referred to the use of local knowledge as a learning context, and substantive integration referred to its incorporation into objectives, content, pedagogy, participation, and assessment. NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, codes, document extracts, observational records, and thematic relationships. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout the analysis to document interpretive decisions and reduce unexamined researcher assumptions.

Research Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings was established through source triangulation, method triangulation, participant validation, an audit trail, and detailed contextual description. Source triangulation compared information from the principal, teachers, students, and Indigenous community leader, while method triangulation compared interviews, observations, focus group data, and documents. Triangulation was used to identify convergence, inconsistency, and context-specific explanations across the evidence rather than to assume that every source would produce identical accounts (Ahmed, 2024). Preliminary interpretations were returned to selected adult informants to confirm factual accuracy and clarify potentially inaccurate meanings through structured member

checking (McKim, 2023). The researcher also maintained records of participant selection, instrument development, coding revisions, theme development, and analytical decisions. Credibility was strengthened by presenting both dominant patterns and contrasting evidence, while transferability was supported through a clear description of the school context, participants, and curriculum practices.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and all informants received information regarding the research purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Written consent was obtained from adult participants, while student participation required assent and permission from parents or guardians. The school was identified as SMP X, and participants were represented through role-based codes in transcripts and reports. Cultural information considered restricted, sacred, or inappropriate for public disclosure was excluded or reported only after approval from the Indigenous community representative. Digital recordings, transcripts, and documents were stored securely and accessed only for research purposes. These procedures ensured that the study respected participant privacy, institutional confidentiality, and community ownership of local knowledge.

RESEARCH RESULT

The findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, a focus group discussion, and document analysis conducted during one academic semester at SMP X in Jayapura, Papua. Ten informants participated in the study, consisting of one principal, four teachers, four eighth-grade students, and one Indigenous community leader. The data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, categorization, theme development, comparison across data sources, and interpretation. The analysis identified three principal themes, namely the symbolic visibility of local culture, the contextual use of local knowledge in classroom learning, and the limited substantive integration of local values into curriculum objectives, teaching strategies, assessment, and community participation. The findings indicate that the school had recognized the importance of local values, but their integration remained strongest in visible cultural activities and teacher-generated examples. Local values had not yet become a consistent foundation for formal curriculum design.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

No.	Theme	Main Finding
1	Symbolic Visibility of Local Culture	Local values were mainly displayed through cultural events, traditional clothing, performances, decorations, and commemorative activities.
2	Contextual Use of Local Knowledge in Learning	Teachers used local stories, community practices, environmental examples, and students' experiences to explain formal subject content.
3	Limited Substantive Curriculum Integration	Local values were not consistently embedded in learning objectives, teaching modules, instructional strategies, assessment, or formal curriculum decision-making.
4	Consultative Indigenous Community Participation	Indigenous community involvement occurred mainly during cultural activities and occasional consultation rather than continuous curriculum collaboration.

Symbolic Visibility of Local Culture

The first theme showed that the most common form of local value integration was the visible representation of Papuan culture in school activities. Cultural elements appeared through traditional clothing, dance performances, local music, school decorations, cultural celebrations, and activities held on special occasions. The principal regarded these practices as an accessible way to introduce students to local identity and encourage respect for cultural diversity. School documentation also showed that cultural activities were included in annual school programs and ceremonial events. However, these activities were generally conducted separately from regular learning objectives and subject assessment.

The principal explained that cultural activities had become the school's primary approach to maintaining students' awareness of their local identity. The principal stated: *"We usually introduce local culture through traditional clothing, dances, songs, and school celebrations. These activities are important because students can directly see and participate in their own culture. However, we have not yet developed a specific curriculum framework that connects every cultural activity with learning objectives in each subject."* (P-01, 12 Maret 2026).

The statement shows that cultural visibility was regarded as educationally important, although its connection with formal curriculum design remained limited. Cultural activities had created opportunities for students to recognize local symbols and traditions, but they had not consistently influenced what students were formally expected to understand. The school therefore demonstrated institutional support for cultural recognition without establishing systematic curriculum alignment.

The teachers expressed a similar view. They believed that traditional performances and local cultural events increased students' enthusiasm because students were familiar with the activities and could participate directly. One teacher explained: *"Students are usually very enthusiastic when we organize activities related to local culture. They enjoy wearing traditional clothing and presenting dances or songs. The difficulty is that these activities are often treated as separate events, so they do not always continue into daily classroom learning or assessment."* (T-01, 19 Maret 2026).

This quotation indicates that symbolic activities had a positive motivational function but were not consistently followed by structured learning. Classroom observations supported this statement because cultural displays were visible around the school, while discussions of their meanings were less frequent during regular lessons. The finding suggests that cultural symbols were recognized more strongly than the knowledge, values, and social relationships underlying them.

The students also remembered cultural celebrations more clearly than curriculum content related to local values. They could mention traditional dances, clothing, food, and performances organized by the school, but they had difficulty identifying how these practices were connected to learning objectives. One student stated: *"I remember the cultural events because we wore traditional clothes and performed dances together. In normal lessons, teachers sometimes talk about Papua, but we are not usually asked to explain the values behind the traditions. Most tests still focus on the material in the textbook."* (S-02, 3 April 2026).

The statement demonstrates that symbolic representation created memorable experiences but did not automatically develop deeper cultural understanding. Students recognized the presence of culture without always understanding how it related to academic knowledge or assessment. The evidence therefore places most school cultural activities within the symbolic level of integration.

Contextual Use of Local Knowledge in Classroom Learning

The second theme showed that teachers used local examples to make formal curriculum content easier for students to understand. Local knowledge appeared through stories, environmental conditions, community cooperation, customary leadership, family relationships, local livelihoods, and examples from students' daily lives. These practices were most visible in social studies, civic education, Indonesian language, and arts-related lessons. Classroom observations showed that student participation increased when teachers discussed situations that students had personally experienced. This form of practice represented contextual integration because local knowledge was used as a bridge between students' experiences and formal concepts.

One teacher explained that local examples were useful for reducing the distance between textbook content and students' realities. The teacher stated: *"When the textbook gives examples from places that students do not know, I usually replace or compare them with examples from Jayapura. For cooperation, I use community activities that students have seen. For environmental topics, I discuss the lake, forest, or waste problems around their communities."* (T-02, 21 Maret 2026).

The quotation indicates that teachers did not simply repeat textbook material but adapted it to students' social and environmental contexts. Such adaptation helped students connect abstract concepts with familiar experiences. However, the use of local examples depended largely on each teacher's initiative rather than a shared school curriculum policy.

Another teacher emphasized the importance of local stories and oral knowledge in language learning. The teacher explained: *"Students become more active when they are asked to retell a story they have heard from their parents or grandparents. They are more confident because the story is close to their lives. The problem is that we do not yet have a collection of local materials that has been validated and can be used by all teachers."* (T-03, 25 Maret 2026).

This statement demonstrates both the educational value and the practical limitation of contextual integration. Local stories encouraged student participation and supported connections between school and family knowledge. Nevertheless, the absence of validated materials meant that local content varied across teachers and classes.

Students confirmed that local examples made lessons easier to understand and discuss. One student stated: *"I understand the lesson faster when the teacher uses examples from our community. We can answer because we have seen the situation ourselves. When the example is from another place and we do not know it, we usually only memorize the explanation."* (S-03, 3 April 2026).

The statement indicates that contextualization supported comprehension rather than simple memorization. Students were able to contribute knowledge from their experiences and relate it to subject concepts. However, the focus group discussion revealed that this approach was not used consistently across all subjects, suggesting that contextual integration remained dependent on individual teacher competence.

The observations and interviews therefore showed that contextual integration was more educationally meaningful than symbolic representation. Local values functioned not merely as visible cultural elements but as resources for explaining formal knowledge. Nevertheless, their use remained informal and uneven because the school had not developed common guidelines, teaching resources, or curriculum mapping. Contextual integration had emerged through teacher creativity but had not yet become an institutionalized school practice. This condition explains why local examples were found in classroom interaction but were less visible in written curriculum documents.

Limited Substantive Integration in Curriculum and Assessment

The third theme showed that local values were not systematically embedded in the formal components of curriculum design. Document analysis found only limited explicit references to local values in learning objectives, teaching modules, student worksheets, and assessment instruments. Teachers frequently used local examples during instruction, but these examples were not always written into lesson objectives or evaluated through assessment criteria. Most assessment tasks continued to emphasize textbook-based knowledge and general academic competencies. The findings therefore reveal a gap between contextual classroom practices and substantive curriculum integration.

A teacher responsible for preparing teaching modules explained the difficulty of converting local values into formal curriculum components. The teacher stated: *"We can use local examples while teaching, but writing them into learning objectives and assessment is more difficult. We must still follow the required learning outcomes and complete the available material. We also do not yet have clear indicators for assessing students' understanding of local values."* (T-04, 28 Maret 2026).

This statement shows that teachers understood the relevance of local knowledge but lacked practical curriculum guidance. The pressure to meet formal learning outcomes and complete subject content also restricted curriculum adaptation. Consequently, local values appeared more easily in spoken explanations than in written planning and assessment.

The principal acknowledged that the school had not formally identified which local values should be integrated across subjects. The principal explained: *"We have discussed the importance of local culture, but we have not mapped the values into each subject or grade level. Teachers still decide individually how they use local examples. We need a joint framework so that cultural integration does not depend only on the interest of one teacher."* (P-01, 12 April 2026).

This quotation indicates that substantive integration requires institutional planning rather than isolated teacher initiatives. Without curriculum mapping, local values could be repeated superficially in some lessons while being absent from others. The school's recognition of local culture had therefore not yet been translated into a coherent curriculum structure.

Student responses also showed that assessment remained culturally disconnected from many learning activities. One student stated: *"Sometimes the teacher explains using examples from our community, but the test questions usually return to the textbook. We are rarely asked to explain a local tradition or community value in an assignment. That is why the local examples feel like explanations, not the main lesson."* (S-04, 3 April 2026).

The student's statement reveals that assessment influenced how learners perceived the importance of local knowledge. When local values were not assessed, students tended to regard them as supplementary explanations rather than legitimate curriculum knowledge. This condition demonstrates why assessment is a critical indicator of substantive integration.

Document analysis supported the interview findings. Local culture was visible in school programs and occasionally in instructional content, but evidence was limited in objectives, performance indicators, rubrics, and student assessment tasks. There was also no formal mechanism for reviewing the cultural accuracy of teaching materials. These findings indicate that the school had not yet achieved coherence among curriculum objectives, pedagogy, instructional materials, community involvement, and assessment. Substantive integration therefore remained the least developed level.

Consultative Rather Than Collaborative Community Participation

The fourth theme concerned the role of the Indigenous community in curriculum development. The school recognized the Indigenous community leader as an important source of knowledge, particularly for cultural ceremonies, local history, customary practices, and the meaning of traditions. However, community participation occurred mainly when the school organized special activities or required cultural information. The Indigenous community leader was not routinely involved in reviewing teaching modules, selecting curriculum content, or designing assessment. Community participation was therefore consultative rather than collaborative.

The Indigenous community leader explained: *"The school sometimes invites us when there is a cultural event or when teachers need information about a tradition. We are pleased to help, but curriculum discussions are still mostly carried out by the school. It would be better if community representatives were involved from the beginning so that local knowledge is not explained incorrectly or only used for performances."* (C-01, 10 April 2026).

The statement indicates that the community's role had been recognized but remained peripheral to formal curriculum authority. The community leader was positioned as a cultural resource rather than a continuous partner in curriculum design. This arrangement limited opportunities to validate meanings, protect sensitive knowledge, and determine appropriate forms of classroom use.

Teachers expressed concern about using cultural materials without sufficient guidance. One teacher stated: *"Sometimes we know a local story or practice, but we are not certain whether our explanation is completely correct. Some knowledge may also have customary rules. We need regular communication with community leaders so that the material is accurate and respectful."* (T-03, 25 Maret 2026).

This statement demonstrates that collaboration is necessary not only to enrich teaching materials but also to ensure cultural ethics. Teachers recognized that local knowledge cannot always be freely interpreted or separated from its customary context. The absence of a structured partnership left teachers uncertain about cultural ownership and appropriate representation.

Students also expressed interest in learning directly from community knowledge holders. One student explained: *"It would be interesting if elders or cultural leaders came to class and explained the meaning of traditions. Teachers can explain the lesson, but community leaders may know the history and meaning more deeply. We could also ask questions directly."* (S-01, 3 April 2026).

This response indicates that direct community participation could support intergenerational learning and deepen students' understanding. Nevertheless, observations found that such learning had not become a regular part of subject planning. The evidence therefore confirms that collaboration had not yet reached the substantive level.

DISCUSSION

The first finding shows that the integration of local values at SMP X was dominated by symbolic representation through traditional clothing, dances, songs, cultural decorations, ceremonies, and special school events. These activities increased the visibility of Papuan culture and helped students recognize local identity within the school environment, but they were generally disconnected from formal learning objectives and assessment. From a critical curriculum perspective, cultural representation alone does not transform education because curriculum authority is reflected in whose knowledge is included in learning plans, classroom activities, and evaluation. Joseph et al. (2024) explain that culturally responsive Indigenous schooling should include relationships with communities, Indigenous knowledge systems, language, sociopolitical understanding, and accurate representation rather than merely displaying cultural symbols. Their study is similar to the present research because both distinguish visible representation from deeper culturally responsive practices, although Joseph et al. developed and validated an assessment instrument for Indigenous-serving schools in the United States, while this study qualitatively examined one junior secondary school in Papua. The current finding therefore indicates that symbolic activities are an important beginning, but they cannot be considered substantive curriculum integration when local values remain marginal in written curriculum documents.

The second finding indicates that contextual integration emerged when teachers used local stories, environmental conditions, customary practices, community cooperation, family experiences, and examples from Jayapura to explain formal subject content. Students participated more actively and understood concepts more easily when lessons were connected with familiar places and experiences, suggesting that local knowledge functioned as a cognitive and cultural bridge. This finding is consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy, which regards learners' cultural backgrounds, languages, and community experiences as resources for constructing academic understanding. Guan et al. (2023) found that culturally responsive teaching involving ethnic music, native languages, local teachers, and collective participation significantly strengthened students' ethnic identity. The similarity lies in the positive role of culturally familiar content in supporting student engagement and identity, but their research examined a structured music intervention in a multiethnic Chinese school, whereas contextualization at SMP X occurred informally across several subjects and depended on individual teacher initiative. This difference shows that contextual practices at SMP X were educationally meaningful but institutionally fragile because they had not been supported by common curriculum guidelines, validated materials, or systematic teacher development.

The third finding reveals that substantive integration remained limited because local values were rarely stated explicitly in learning objectives, teaching modules, student worksheets, assessment indicators, and scoring rubrics. Teachers used local examples during instruction, but tests and assignments continued to focus mainly on textbook knowledge and general academic competencies. This gap indicates weak curriculum alignment because the knowledge presented in classroom discussion was not consistently reflected in the outcomes students were formally expected to achieve. Joseph et al. (2024) emphasize that culturally responsive curriculum evaluation must examine multiple dimensions, including Indigenous knowledge, language, representation, relationships, and sociopolitical context, rather than relying on a single visible indicator. Compared with their multidimensional framework, the practices at SMP X were concentrated on representation and classroom contextualization, with limited evidence of institutional integration. The consequence is that students may regard local values as interesting illustrations rather than academically legitimate knowledge, while the present study contributes a practical distinction by defining substantive integration as coherence among objectives, content, pedagogy, community participation, and assessment.

The fourth finding demonstrates that Indigenous community participation remained consultative because the community leader was mainly invited to support cultural events or provide occasional information about traditions. The community had not been systematically involved in selecting local values, reviewing teaching materials, designing learning activities, validating cultural interpretations, or developing assessment. This condition is important because community knowledge carries particular meanings, ownership, relationships, and ethical boundaries that cannot always be interpreted independently by schools. Mpuangnan and Ntombela (2024) argue that active community involvement and community needs assessment improve curriculum relevance, learner engagement, and educational outcomes by ensuring that curriculum reflects the values and needs of the society it serves. Similarly, St John et al. (2024) showed through an Aboriginal education co-design program that sustained dialogue and shared participation are necessary for producing educational practices that are responsive to local community priorities. These studies support the present findings, but they describe structured community involvement, whereas SMP X still positioned the Indigenous leader mainly as a cultural resource; therefore, the school needs to move from consultation toward shared curriculum authority.

Taken together, the findings produce a three-level framework consisting of symbolic, contextual, and substantive integration. Symbolic integration makes local culture visible, contextual integration connects curriculum content with students' lived experiences, and substantive integration institutionalizes local values across objectives, materials, teaching strategies, assessment, and community decision-making. Earlier studies generally emphasize cultural representation, culturally responsive teaching, community voices, or curriculum assessment as separate dimensions, whereas the present research combines these

dimensions into a progressive framework for evaluating the depth of local value integration. The framework does not assume that the three levels are mutually exclusive because one cultural activity may remain symbolic, become contextual when connected to subject concepts, and become substantive when formally planned, community-validated, and assessed. Its main novelty therefore lies in shifting the evaluation question from whether local culture is present to how deeply it influences curriculum structures and who possesses authority over its interpretation. Practically, the findings imply that SMP X should retain cultural activities while developing curriculum mapping, culturally grounded assessment, validated local learning resources, teacher professional development, and a permanent school-community curriculum forum.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the integration of local values into curriculum design at SMP X in Jayapura remained uneven across symbolic, contextual, and substantive levels. Local culture was clearly visible through school events, traditional clothing, performances, and classroom examples, but it had not yet been consistently incorporated into learning objectives, teaching modules, instructional strategies, and assessment. Indigenous community participation was also still consultative rather than collaborative. The study therefore recommends that the school develop a structured curriculum mapping process, validated local learning materials, culturally responsive assessment, and regular teacher development. A permanent school-community curriculum forum should also be established to involve Indigenous knowledge holders in selecting, validating, implementing, and evaluating local content. These measures can help transform local culture from an occasional educational theme into a coherent foundation for culturally responsive curriculum development.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study was limited to one junior secondary school and ten informants during one academic semester. Future research should involve several schools, wider participant groups, and longer observation periods to compare patterns of local value integration across different educational contexts in Papua. Further studies may also test the practical use of the symbolic, contextual, and substantive integration framework in curriculum evaluation and school improvement.

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