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## Envisioning school autonomy to leverage culturally responsive learning: Evidence from East Java and East Nusa Tenggara

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Discussion Paper No. 20

# Envisioning School Autonomy to Leverage Culturally Responsive Learning:

## Evidence from East Java and East Nusa Tenggara

By Sharfina Indrayadi, Riyandi Saras Anggita, and Yulia Esti Utami









**Discussion Paper No. 20**

**Envisioning School Autonomy to Leverage Culturally Responsive Learning: Evidence from East Java and East Nusa Tenggara**

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## GLOSSARY

**BPMP:**

*Balai Penjamin Mutu Pendidikan*

**CDI:**

Cultural Development Index

**CRL:**

Culturally Responsive Learning

**CSO:**

Civil Society Organization

**KKG:**

Teacher Working Group (*Kelompok Kerja Guru*)

**LPTK:**

Teacher Education Providers (*Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan*)

**MGMP:**

Subject Teacher Forum (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*)

**MoEC:**

Ministry of Education and Culture

**MoECRT:**

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology

**MoPSE:**

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

**NTT:**

East Nusa Tenggara (*Nusa Tenggara Timur*):

**OECD:**

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**P5:**

Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile Project (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*)

**PBL:**

Project-Based Learning

**PPG:**

Teacher Professional Education (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru*)

**SBM:**

School Based-Management



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Indonesia's socio-cultural and geographical diversity necessitates a decentralized education system, which has been in effect since the late 1990s. This decentralization enables schools to tailor education practices to local contexts, emphasizing culturally responsive learning (CRL) to accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

School autonomy, as reinforced by Law No. 20/2003 and Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation No. 47/2023, grants schools authority and flexibility in terms of curriculum development, teacher management, and community engagement, which ensures education remains inclusive and contextually relevant. Policies such as the Merdeka Curriculum support CRL by granting regional policies the flexibility to facilitate local context learning across curricular and co-curricular activities. Local governments can operationalize this by developing targeted regulations concerning local content, teaching approaches, materials, and implementation strategies.

However, challenges persist, including teachers' limited capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and the difficulty of balancing national curriculum standards with local adaptations. While CRL offers a promising framework for inclusive education, its effectiveness depends on strong school leadership, community collaboration, and adequate resource allocation to support its implementation across diverse regions.

The local context is more prominently reflected in regional regulations. For example, schools in Java and outer Java, which have distinct geographical and socio-economic contexts, apply autonomy differently to adapt CRL. A case study of East Java and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) reveals significant regional differences in the policy framework that governs CRL implementation. East Java's policy focuses on a broader adaptive learning framework, integrating technology and inclusive education while emphasizing culturally relevant materials, local context-based teaching methods, and extracurricular activities. By contrast, NTT prioritizes culturally responsive learning, with a strong emphasis on the use of native languages to improve literacy. These differences result in different levels of school autonomy across three main areas: culturally responsive teaching approaches (pedagogy), incorporation of local contexts into teaching materials, and culturally relevant project-based learning.

Effective CRL implementation at the regional level depends on two key factors that expand schools' autonomy with regard to integration. First, strengthening informal teacher training programs, such as the Subject Teacher Forum (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* or MGMP) and the Teacher Working Group (*Kelompok Kerja Guru* or KKG), can provide a cost-effective and targeted approach to integrating local context subjects and making learning more relevant to local knowledge.

Second, Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 75/2016 on School Committees allows the inclusion of local education experts, civil society organizations (CSOs), and education advocates beyond parents. Revitalizing school committees strengthens community participation in CRL by defining clear stakeholder roles, socializing regulations, and ensuring sustained engagement. Village communities are key stakeholders beyond parents. Positioning specific local communities—such as cultural practitioners for extracurricular activities, education experts for intracurricular development, and CSOs for co-curricular support—ensures the effective integration of local contexts across learning areas.



## DECENTRALIZATION, SCHOOL AUTONOMY, AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia has over 500 different ethnic groups and more than 700 local dialects, each with distinct cultural traditions (Ministry of Education and Culture [MoEC], 2014). The socio-cultural and geographical diversity and plurality, as well as the need to accommodate the participation of local governments and communities, were among the reasons for the country's transition from a highly centralized education system to a decentralized system, which has been in effect since the late 1990s (Zamjani, 2022). International organizations such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank claim that this significant change can be considered a means to make curricula more sensitive to local contexts, provide authority to diversify funding sources, and possibly strengthen local democracy (Amirrachman et al., 2008).

Decentralization facilitates the tailoring of education to local conditions, which offers some benefits for a nation with great diversity, such as Indonesia (Rahman, 2019). First, it allows the development of curricula that integrate local languages and cultures. Furthermore, integrating local customs into teaching plans or textbooks guarantees that learning reflects the values, needs, and realities of the areas it serves. These acts of cultural sensitivity ensure that the needs of students from diverse backgrounds are accommodated in the learning process, which facilitates learning performance.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) defines inclusive education as a dynamic process that continuously evolves in response to the local culture and context to overcome barriers to learning and allow participation of everyone. This resonates well with the nation's commitment to further inclusivity, as outlined in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT)<sup>1</sup> *Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education*, which emphasize an education system that accommodates diverse backgrounds, including students' culture (MoECRT, 2022). Providing every student with an inclusive form of culturally relevant education relies on teachers modifying their instruction to be contextual in relation to several environments (Mariyono, 2024). It would be difficult to achieve if the educational system remained uniform and disregarded a bottom-up approach.

Decentralization facilitates the tailoring of education to local conditions, which offers some benefits for a nation with great diversity.

Inclusive, locally sensitive education necessitates the transfer of responsibilities for education management to schools, commonly known as school autonomy (World Bank, 2016). The OECD (2018) states that this process entails collaboration among local education communities, comprising local governments, schools, and parents, to reconcile local demands with the regulations and standards of the education system. Consequently, this approach emphasizes both the obligations and the responsibilities of local communities in addressing learning needs.

<sup>1</sup> As of 2025, the MoECRT has been renamed the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.



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A number of policies provided a framework for establishing school autonomy. For instance, Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System established minimum service standards for the early childhood, primary, and secondary education units (K–12). These standards are implemented through school-based management (SBM) principles, which allow schools the autonomy to manage their educational activities, allowing principals and teachers, supported by school committees, to operate. The MoECRT further emphasized these SBM principles<sup>2</sup> through MoECRT Regulation No. 47/2023 on K–12 Management Standards, which stresses schools' freedom in managing intra- and extracurricular education activities, builds community partnerships through active community engagement, and promotes openness in reporting education activities to relevant parties.

However, despite the adoption of SBM, school management is still divided into several jurisdictional authorities. Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Autonomy outlines the division of power among provinces, districts/cities, and schools in planning the local curriculum content, budgeting, and evaluating schools independently at the K–12 levels, as well as in non-formal or special education. Among these three agencies, teacher management—including transfers, allocations, and appointments of specific types of teachers—is also equally split. This suggests that the autonomy and flexibility connected to curriculum development and teacher management should already fit local needs, even at the school level.

Granting autonomy in terms of curriculum development to acknowledge the diversity in learning is most prominently reflected in Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 7/2009 on Inclusive Education.<sup>3</sup> This regulation addresses students' diverse needs by allowing schools the autonomy to adjust the curriculum and ensure that both teachers and learning materials meet the needs of students with special needs<sup>4</sup> (Directorate of Special Education and Special Services, 2011). The guidelines promote the establishment of inclusive schools that involve students with and without special needs in one formal learning environment. Ultimately, the goal is not only to meet students' needs but also to ensure they are accepted, engaged, and supported by teachers, peers, and the community, regardless of their background.

Beyond inclusive schools, regular schools also benefit from the increased freedom in relation to curriculum development. The national Merdeka Curriculum—as outlined in MoECRT Regulation No. 12/2024 on Curriculum for ECE, Primary and Secondary Education Levels—allows teachers flexibility to tailor lessons to individual students' needs and places an emphasis on student-centered learning<sup>5</sup> in all schools. Its design emphasizes cultural relevance through aligning teaching methods by integrating local cultural elements (Sianturi et al., 2023) and stimulates community involvement to ensure learning is relevant to the surrounding environment (Rohmah et al., 2024). Therefore, the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to improve learning experiences by also recognizing the cultural backgrounds of all Indonesian students as a mean to make learning relevant (Risna, 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> SBM includes (1) school autonomy in management, (2) building partnerships, (3) encouraging community participation, (4) ensuring information transparency, and (5) accountability to stakeholders.

<sup>3</sup> The law mandates that local governments designate inclusive schools (*Sekolah Inklusi*) in each sub-district, providing an adaptive curriculum especially tailored for students with special needs.

<sup>4</sup> According to Article 3, students with special needs are those with vision, hearing, speech, intellectual, physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning difficulties; delayed learning; autism; motor impairments; other specialized conditions; and multiple disabilities, and those who have been substance abuse victims.

<sup>5</sup> Article 27 emphasizes flexibility in education by granting schools the freedom to develop curricula within the basic framework (27a), requiring inclusive education programs for children with special needs (27b); allowing reflection, evaluation, and improvement of curriculum implementation (27c); and mandating active participation in community engagement (27d).



Inclusive education critically depends on culturally responsive learning (CRL) as an educational approach. CRL allows schools more freedom in customizing materials and pedagogical strategies to fit the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their students (Gabbadon, 2024). In line with student-centered learning objectives, it also motivates educational institutions to modify their systems and policies to meet the requirements of both the wider community and their students (Kaput, 2018). Good application of CRL depends on school-level commitment to teachers' continuing professional development to improve their ability to adapt culturally sensitive approaches and build more inclusive classrooms (Brady, 2023).

Inclusive education critically depends on culturally responsive learning (CRL) as an educational approach.

The above overview shows how the integration of culture into Indonesia's national education regulations has evolved from merely integrating local content to prioritizing inclusivity and strengthening fundamental competencies. Table 1 highlights this commitment by listing the priority programs and regulations developed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE).<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1.**  
**Indonesia's Progress in Acknowledging CRL in its Policy Framework**

Policy/Program	Aspect of CRL Acknowledged
MoEC Regulation No. 79/2014 on Local Content	Local content is developed in accordance with competency development and need, emphasizing flexibility and encompassing arts and culture, crafts, physical education, language, and technology.
Merdeka Curriculum	Freedom in terms of learning includes developing, facilitating, and establishing qualifications for local content educators. Local content is taught as part of the <i>Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> or P5 (a project-based learning on strengthening character Education) program.
<i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Episode 17 on Local Language Revitalization	The principle of revitalization is not merely about protecting language but also about adapting it to the school environment and context.
The 2025–2045 Education Roadmap	Commitment to teacher training is expected to support quality learning aligned with students' backgrounds and needs.
MoPSE Priority Programs 2025	Acknowledging diversity in language and literature as a means of improving literacy.

Source: Author analysis based on national government documents from the MoEC, MoECRT, MoPSE, and National Development Planning Agency.

<sup>6</sup> Under the new administration since October 2024, the nomenclature of the MoEC and the MoECRT has been changed to the MoPSE.



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Beyond regulation and policy commitment, schools have struggled to implement CRL. To ensure CRL, schools must exercise their autonomy by innovating in their classrooms—that is, by means of creativity exploring the application of project-based learning techniques or including technology in the learning process (Pane, 2024). Schools often find it difficult to strike a balance between the national curriculum and the freedom they have been granted in terms of cultural adaptation. Their limited pedagogical knowledge calls for increased mentoring or training to include CRL in every teaching activity (Fitriah et al., 2024).

“Ultimately, school management plays a significant role in the implementation of CRL, much like its contribution to the success of various teaching approaches.”

Additionally, many parts of Indonesia have inadequate resources and educational infrastructure. For intracurricular purposes, there are limited locally diverse textbooks reflecting students’ cultural variation, especially among marginalized communities or in the outer regions (Innovation for Indonesia’s School Children [INOVASI], 2022). This dearth of culturally relevant resources makes it difficult for teachers to create meaningful learning opportunities for their students. Extracurricular activities are positioned to make use of CRL as a tool for increasing student engagement outside classroom environments. Nonetheless, schools continue to be constrained by insufficient infrastructure and resources, as well as by limited funding (Herdiati & Saputra, 2021).

Ultimately, school management plays a significant role in the implementation of CRL, much like its contribution to the success of various teaching approaches. Indonesia’s school principals, teachers, and school committees should be able to properly manage their institutions to guarantee cultural attitudes and values are ingrained in them (World Bank, 2012). This includes reflecting on, monitoring, and evaluating learning practices to ensure that they align with the cultural and contextual needs of students and their communities (Sturtevant, 2019). School leaders must also act as learning managers who can prioritize culturally sensitive learning based on student needs to create an inclusive and engaging educational environment (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024; Tanzi & Hermanto, 2024).



# CULTURALLY ADAPTIVE CURRICULA TO ACCOMMODATE STUDENTS' LEARNING NEEDS

A culturally adaptive curriculum facilitates meeting a number of needs beyond celebrating variety. Table 2 explains the key features of embedding culture into a school's curriculum. Samuels (2018) views this idea as an attempt to respect the surroundings of students, which fosters inclusive and fair learning environments. This encourages tolerance and respect among students as they negotiate different environments with empathy and understanding (Hartinah et al., 2023; Lestari, 2023). As a result, a successful character is developed. Indeed, instilling cultural values in children is believed to foster a noble character and strong moral integrity (Liana et al., 2018).

**Table 2.**  
**Key features of Culture Responsive Curriculum**

Feature	Activities
Valuing community languages, practices, and ways of being.	Students' languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being are centered meaningfully and consistently in classroom learning instead of being considered "add-ons."
Schools are accountable to the community.	Teachers and schools are in conversation with communities about what they desire and want to sustain through schooling.
Curriculum connects to cultural and linguistic histories.	Teachers connect present learning to the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities, both locally and nationally.
Sustaining cultural and linguistic practices while providing access to the dominant culture.	Teachers value and sustain the cultural and linguistic practices of the community while providing access to the dominant culture (middle class and standard language speaking).

Source: Felazzo (2017).

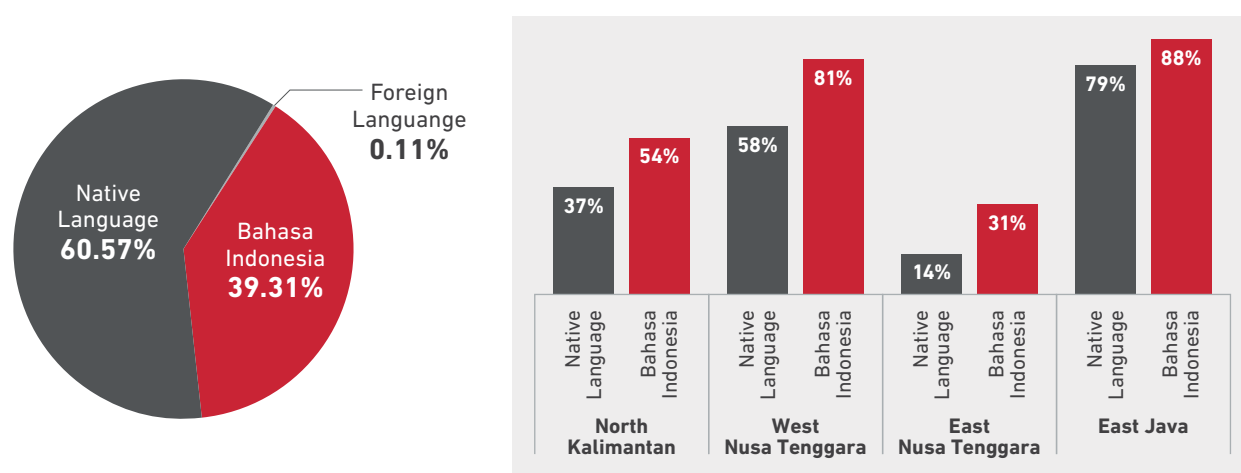
Table 2 also highlights schools' community involvement as a key feature. This promotes the relevance of learning to real-world events outside the classroom. Making learning more relevant by linking it to actual practice and local customs or traditions helps render it more practical, contextual, and meaningful. Hands-on learning fosters students' critical thinking and creativity (Febriyana et al., 2024). Role-playing, storytelling, and investigating traditional customs all help children develop their social skills and cognitive capacities (Widyahening, 2020).

Using native or local languages in early grade classes substantially helps reinforce fundamental skills, including literacy and numeracy. In fact, the majority of Indonesia's population speak local languages in regular speech.



Using native or local languages in early grade classes substantially helps reinforce fundamental skills, including literacy and numeracy. In fact, the majority of Indonesia’s population speak local languages in regular speech, as shown in Figure 1. However, most teachers use Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom, which then potentially prompts learning outcome disparities. According to MoECRT surveys, students who mostly speak local languages exhibit lower performance on basic literacy tests in various areas (Figure 1) when compared with those who are competent in Bahasa Indonesia. A significant challenge is faced by children whose mother tongue is a regional language, as they struggle to grasp materials taught in Indonesian (Center for Education Standards and Policies [PSKP], 2021). Therefore, early grade integration of mother tongue or local languages can help children understand lessons better and enhance the general quality of instruction.

**Figure 1.**  
**Language Use in Communication Age 5+ (left) and Foundational Literacy Test Pass Rate for Grade 2: Comparison of Bahasa Indonesia and Native Language (right)**



Source: Susenas MSBP, 2021; MOECRT, 2016<sup>7</sup>

Given the number of indigenous communities in Indonesia, education was firmly anchored in indigenous traditions, customs, and cultural practices, emphasizing the transmission of information through traditions, customs, and hands-on experiences, where many such approaches were embedded in the activities shown in Table 2. A case study of public schools in the Tengger, Dayak, Kajang, and Rimba areas shows that this kind of learning is needed to get more students involved (Firdausy et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the case study reveals that contextual learning is often not facilitated because it overlooks local knowledge and proceeds with generic lessons instead.

Such a lack of inclusiveness could cause further marginalization, compromising the objective of providing every child with a fair education. This calls for learning to incorporate local contexts, which is also stipulated in Indonesia’s 2025–2045 Education Roadmap for implementing a contextual learning that promotes learning’s relevance and effectiveness by including local contexts, values, and knowledge systems.

<sup>7</sup> Data was presented during the Policy Forum discussion for this study by representatives of the Ministry of National Development Planning.



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With the autonomy to adapt learning, schools have to actively look at what learning methods and curricula work best, improve teachers' skills, and build stronger community partnerships to deal with the multicultural aspects of learning and make the school environment more welcoming for everyone. The next section will explore how schools can use their autonomy to apply a CRL framework to adapt education in primary education settings to the local community's needs.

When schools exercise their autonomy according to the local context, they integrate cultural values into Indonesia's primary education, which fosters an inclusive and responsive learning environment. Autonomy empowers teachers to tailor curricula to the specific needs of their students, enhancing both curriculum flexibility and teacher readiness (OECD, 2024). Moreover, it extends beyond lesson planning to encompass self-governance in areas such as assessment, resource management, and staffing (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024). This perspective frames autonomy as a more comprehensive and structured approach to SBM, which integrates decision-making across curricula content, teacher adaptability, and operational needs—including budgeting and financial planning (World Bank, 2017)—thereby ensuring that learning remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to local cultural contexts.

When schools exercise their autonomy according to the local context, they integrate cultural values into Indonesia's primary education, which fosters an inclusive and responsive learning environment.



## SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND CRL: KEY FINDINGS

Different facets of autonomy may be practiced based on a school's context. The Center for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS) conducted a survey of school leaders from 104 primary-level schools across targeted cities in East Java and East Nusa Tenggara to examine how the schools exercise their autonomy to adapt to different contexts.

East Java was chosen to represent western Indonesia due to its advanced development and high numbers of elementary students, teachers, and schools (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024). The province promotes inclusive education by recognizing students with special needs as facing cultural, geographical, or economic barriers, ensuring broader access to high-quality learning.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) represents eastern Indonesia, which faces greater educational challenges. With the highest numbers of students, teachers, and schools in the region, it serves as a key case study (BPS, 2024). NTT's focus on mother tongue instruction in the early grades helps address low literacy rates, ensuring young learners start their education in a language they understand. This highlights the importance of culturally responsive education in bridging regional disparities (Education Report East Nusa Tenggara, 2024; MoEC, 2021).

“Teachers' readiness is an important component of ensuring well-functioning CRL.”

The data collection sought to investigate several types of autonomy, encompassing decision-making in terms of lesson design, budget management, human resource administration, partnerships and collaborations, and student assessment. All of these are accounted for by the development of CRL. Additionally, in-depth interviews with school leaders<sup>9</sup> were conducted in 20 schools in each province to gain a better understanding of how autonomy is exercised in each aspect and determine its relation to CRL.

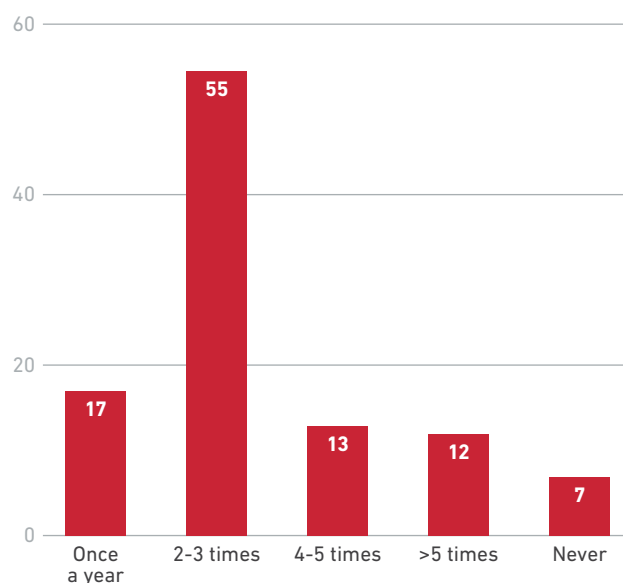
The study revealed that, as learning managers, teachers' readiness is an important component of ensuring well-functioning CRL by developing both their pedagogical knowledge and their motivation to continually contextualize the learning process. However, only a few training sessions focused on how to include students' linguistic backgrounds in lesson plans (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Article 1 on of Governor Regulation No. 30/2018 on Implementation of Inclusive Education.

<sup>9</sup> These interviews explored the extent to which school leaders make independent decisions regarding curriculum adaptation, resource allocation, and teacher capacity-building to align learning with local cultural contexts.



**Figure 2.**  
**How often does your school hold in-house training and professional development programs for teachers and other staff each year?**

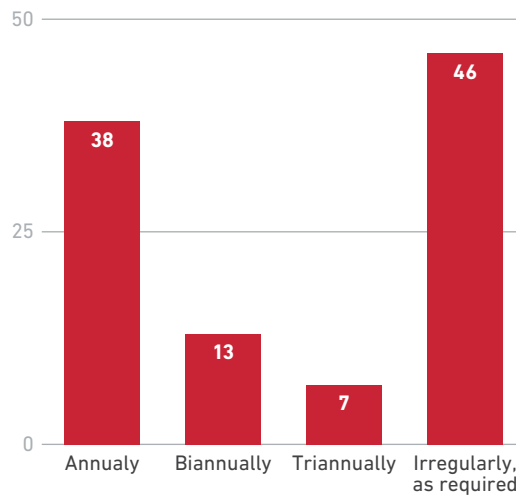


Source: CIPS Survey (2024)

Around half the survey respondents reported that they typically run two to three in-house teacher training and professional development sessions a year, focusing on school management to improve teaching quality (Figure 2). This teacher training focuses on strategies to support students with learning delays and manage school finances (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). Conducted through in-school learning communities, these sessions typically take place at the start, middle, and end of the academic year, often during school holidays (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). Additional training is provided by local education offices, private sector organizations, and other learning communities, usually between one and three times a year. Unfortunately, these types of training sessions are not sufficient for good implementation of CRL, especially in terms of detailing how to incorporate students' native languages into lesson planning.



**Figure 3.**  
**How often is the curriculum or learning plan updated to ensure its relevance?**



Source: CIPS Survey (2024)

Ensuring adaptive learning requires schools to regularly revise their curriculum plans so that they remain relevant to students' needs. Based on this survey, 38 schools update their learning plans once a year, while 13 schools conduct biannual evaluations to maintain alignment with local contexts (Figure 3). In the first scenario, it is plausible that the annual revision coincides with the preparation of the school budget and activity plan, which typically takes place annually. In the second scenario, the schools are likely conducting learning evaluations each semester.

**Adaptive learning requires schools to regularly revise their curriculum plans so that they remain relevant to students' needs.**

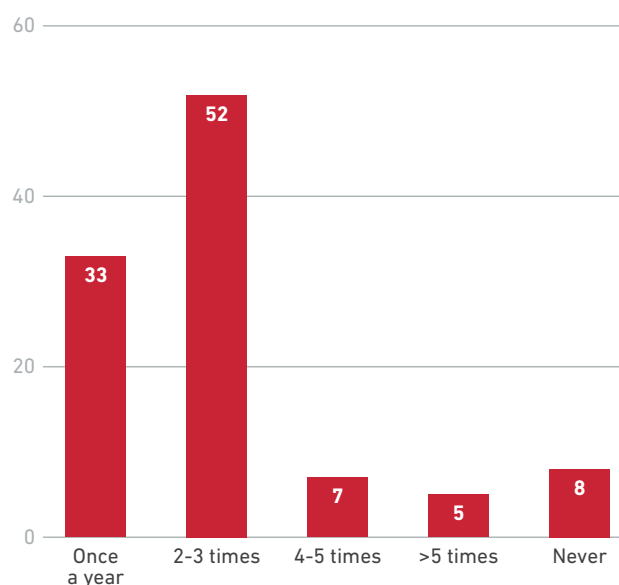
These patterns indicate that the schools recognize the importance of integrating systematic institutional planning with ongoing instructional reviews, thereby enhancing the responsiveness of their curriculum design to both temporal and local needs. However, the surveys also show that the majority of schools update their learning plans irregularly, which may depend on policy changes or local government directives (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024).

As Figure 3 shows, high proportion of the surveyed schools update their curriculum once a year. Notably, changes in innovation or policy at regional levels influence schools to incorporate more culturally relevant lessons into the curriculum in both regions (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). Independent evaluations are conducted two to three times per academic year and may be followed by different curriculum modifications.

Furthermore, forging community partnerships with parents, local communities, and the private sector is vital in ensuring that learning processes remain contextually relevant. Most schools recognize that engaging parents as primary stakeholders provides deeper insight into students' needs (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024) by helping bridge the gap between students' daily lives and academic content (Yulianti et al., 2019). When inquiring into how frequently schools independently seek the involvement of these key stakeholders in developing and evaluating their learning programs to acknowledge local contexts, 85 schools reported involving them once to three times a year (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.**  
**How often does your school involve parents, the local community, and/or local organizations in developing and evaluating the learning process to ensure its relevance to the local context in a year?**



Source: CIPS Survey (2024)

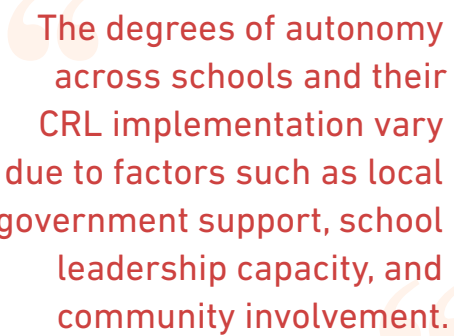
Furthermore, this study examined the correlation between school autonomy and the implementation of adaptive curricula in the form of CRL practices. For instance, in NTT, particularly in Southwest Sumba, the use of native languages significantly influences collaboration—that is, more frequent use of native languages corresponds to higher levels of collaboration. This is because integrating native languages into learning is crucial for improving literacy, especially in early grade classrooms, necessitating deeper engagement between schools and parents to align educational approaches (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024). This suggests that cultural interventions are most commonly embedded within the core intracurricular practices.

Yet the determinants of collaboration vary across regions. Looking specifically at East Java, for example, in Banyuwangi, collaboration is shaped by the diversity of non-academic activities and the adoption of inclusive and adaptive learning approaches. Schools that design their curricula to incorporate a wide range of non-academic activities and inclusive pedagogical methods tend to foster broader collaboration, not only with parents but also with local communities that support co-curricular and extracurricular learning (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024).

In Southwest Sumba, evaluations are typically followed by the inclusion of native languages as local content. By contrast, in Banyuwangi, the evaluation results usually promote the addition of more culturally embedded lessons to the curriculum beyond the local content curriculum (*Muatan lokal* or *Mulok*). This is mainly evident in the fact that most collaborations in Banyuwangi take place through the high number of inclusive and adaptive learning activities, both academic and non-academic, organized by the schools. These activities include having designated days for local languages, field trips, cultural sites, and museum to traditional market visits for direct exposure to local communities and practical learning experience (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024).



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The degrees of autonomy across schools and their CRL implementation vary due to factors such as local government support, school leadership capacity, and community involvement.

The findings of this study also highlight how the degrees of autonomy across schools and their CRL implementation vary due to factors such as local government support, school leadership capacity, and community involvement. This is even more evident when regular schools and inclusive schools are considered separately. Generally, local governments pay inclusive schools particular attention because they serve students with special inclusion requirements (INOVASI, 2019; World Bank, 2022). These schools are supposed to be designed with a basic capacity to generate adaptable learning strategies that are fit for local needs. The following section will discuss how governments manage and prioritize their resources for adaptive learning.



# REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF CRL POLICIES IN EAST JAVA AND NTT

East Java and NTT differ greatly in terms of socio-economic and geographical factors, which results in contrasting levels of education infrastructure and access, teaching methods, and learning outcomes. East Java, with its well-developed infrastructure and urban centers, provides better school facilities, digital learning access, and qualified teachers, making education more accessible. By contrast, NTT's remote islands and rugged terrain create challenges, with many students traveling long distances to school and facing limited resources, teacher shortages, and inadequate infrastructure (World Bank, 2019).

Consequently, the teaching methods also differ, as East Java integrates technology for inclusive learning, whereas NTT's schools rely more on traditional, community-based learning with elements of local cultures (Darong et al., 2021; Lehan et al., 2024; Riska et al., 2024). Socio-economic conditions further impact education, with East Java's stronger economy allowing for better access to higher education, while the economic hardship in NTT often leads to higher dropout rates (Lobo & Guntur, 2017). Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies, improved infrastructure, and teacher training programs to ensure equitable education for students in both regions.

Governance and political will play a considerable role in the variations in CRL implementation seen in the two regions. Table 3 lists the relevant regulations on education and inclusivity in East Java and NTT, and it identifies how well they integrate cultural responsiveness.

**Table 3.**  
**Regional Policy Framework Assessed via Dimension of Adaptive Learning**

Regional Policy	Inclusive Learning	Dimension of CRL			
		Culturally Relevant Teaching Approach <sup>10</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Material <sup>11</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Projects <sup>12</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies <sup>13</sup>
NTT					
East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Regulation No. 6/2022 on Fulfillment of the Rights of People with Disability	✓				
East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Regulation No. 11/2019 on Education Implementation	✓	✓	✓		
Kupang Regional Regulation No.2/2019 on Protection and Fulfilment of the Rights of People with Disabilities	✓				
Kupang City Regional Regulation No. 7/2016 on Education Management	✓	✓	✓		



Regional Policy	Inclusive Learning	Dimension of CRL			
		Culturally Relevant Teaching Approach <sup>10</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Material <sup>11</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Projects <sup>12</sup>	Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies <sup>13</sup>
East Java					
East Java Governor Regulation No.30/2018 on Inclusive Education	✓				
East Java Provincial Regulation No.11/2017 on Education Management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Malang Regional Regulation No.2/2019 on Amendment to Regional Regulation Number 3/2014 on the Education Administration System	✓		✓	✓	
Batu Regional Regulation No.188.45/227/KEP/422.012/2019 on Local Content Subject	✓	✓			
Banyuwangi Regional Regulation No.68/2012 on Inclusive Education	✓				
Banyuwangi Regional Regulation No.14/2017 on Culture Preservation	✓		✓	✓	
Banyuwangi Regional Regulation No.5/2007 on Local Language Learning in Primary Education Level	✓	✓	✓		✓

Source: Author analysis using Hernandez and Burrows' (2021) frameworks.

In East Java, where technology is integrated and inclusive education is prioritized, the approach extends beyond the conventional focus on adaptive learning for students with disabilities. Provincial and district-level regulations emphasize a broader adaptive learning process that ensures the availability of culturally relevant materials to enhance contextual learning, the implementation of teaching methods along with extracurricular/project learning aligned with local contexts, and the establishment of standards for adaptive education delivery (culturally relevant strategies). This reflects a more comprehensive and locally systematic effort to embed cultural relevance in education, reinforcing both accessibility for all students and contextual responsiveness in the learning process.

<sup>10</sup> Curriculum that integrates students' diverse backgrounds through local context.

<sup>11</sup> Instructional resources designed to reflect students' backgrounds, preferences, and lived experiences, fostering engagement and facilitating learning.

<sup>12</sup> Projects and special events are structured activities designed to reinforce students' knowledge by incorporating culturally responsive teaching (CRT) principles, enhancing engagement and learning

<sup>13</sup> Standardized teaching approaches are adapted to accommodate students' learning styles by incorporating local customs, language, and traditions to improve engagement and comprehension.



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By contrast, adaptive learning in NTT is shaped by a combination of inclusive education policies and culturally relevant curricula. The establishment of Disability Service Units (*Unit Layanan Disabilitas*) ensures that educators are equipped to support students with disabilities through teacher training, individualized assistance, early intervention, and provision of assistive learning tools. Simultaneously, local content curricula emphasize regional strengths, environmental awareness, and cultural preservation, fostering a learning environment that aligns with students' social and cultural backgrounds. In specific districts or cities, the use of the native language as the language of instruction is emphasized as a key strategy for enhancing literacy.

The different degrees of adaptive curriculum integration in the regulatory frameworks of East Java and NTT have affected their priorities and execution in terms of school autonomy in relation to CRL implementation in several respects, as discussed below.

## Role of the Native Language in Culturally Relevant Teaching Approaches: Medium of Instruction or Means of Cultural Expression?

Language plays a crucial role in teacher–student relationships, serving as both a communication tool and a means of strengthening social bonds (Hartati & Anwar, 2023). A study has shown that instruction in a student's native language enhances academic performance and self-esteem (Cummins et al., 2019). In the dimension of culturally relevant teaching, regional regulations are often reflected in the integration of the native language as the medium of instruction in the classroom.

At the national policy level, the implementation of language as a tool to facilitate teacher–student interactions is reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 63/2019 on the Use of Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), where Article 23 permits the use of the native language as the medium of instruction in primary education, especially during the first two years.

In regions such as NTT, where the mother tongue is most commonly spoken, one particular objective of using native language is to bridge the literacy gap that persists for children in these regions (Interview with Local Government in NTT, 2024). As students advance to higher grade levels, teachers are encouraged to transition from native languages to Bahasa Indonesia to align with the textbooks, which are primarily written in the national language (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024).

This is reflected in the regulations outlined in Table 3, including Kupang Regional Regulation No. 7/2016, Article 58(2), and East Nusa Tenggara Timur Provincial Regulation No. 11/2019, Articles 93–97, which explicitly permit the use of regional language as a medium of instruction. However, in specific cases, the use of native languages persists even at higher grade levels. In Kodi, NTT, early grade instruction primarily relies on native languages, while higher grades still use these languages as a supplementary tool for clarifying complex concepts (INOVASI, 2021; Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024).

Other studies have reached similar conclusions. In regions outside of Java, teachers do use native languages to support students who have difficulty with Bahasa Indonesia (Arsendy, 2019; Pamungkas et al., 2023). A study conducted by CIPS in Sumba Barat Daya also revealed that 84%



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of the 50 surveyed schools integrate native languages into their teaching. This strong emphasis is reinforced by students' home environments, where daily communication predominantly takes place in local dialects, including in public spaces (Benu et al., 2022; Haryati, 2022).

In East Java, however, the approach is different. Taking the case of Banyuwangi Local Regulation No. 5/2007 on Native Language Learning in Primary Schools as an example, Javanese is not only mandated as an introductory language in the early grades but also used to set a critical precedent for teacher qualifications in native language instruction. This is committed to the extent of requiring teachers to obtain professional training. Therefore, the regulation shifts native language education from informal communication in the classroom to a structured and pedagogically sound learning approach.

This example shows that, in East Java, the use of native languages in schools can also serve as a means of cultural expression rather than just a medium of instruction (Fitriyani & Syamsiah, 2018; Sukari et al., 2023). Javanese is incorporated into specific activities, such as storytelling, traditional performances, and cultural ceremonies, rather than being embedded into daily lessons (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024; Nurmasari & Subiyantor, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2023). In this way, teachers are positioned not only as educators facilitating classroom learning but also as key figures in co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The regulations strengthen the local government's commitment to ensuring that teachers not only serve as language transmitters but also as skilled facilitators who can effectively integrate cultural identity into the learning process, including intracurricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular practices. This approach not only fosters a sense of cultural identity among students but also makes learning the native language an engaging and enjoyable experience (Salam, 2019).

While the implementation of native language instruction is encouraging, there are two key areas that still require improvement. First, there are no clear guidelines for evaluating the impact of these policies on student learning outcomes. For instance, MoEC Regulation No. 42/2018 on National Linguistic and Literacy Policy, Article 11, which governs the use of native languages in education, lacks specific strategies or directives concerning how schools should incorporate native language instruction, particularly at the primary level. Second, Article 7 limits native language preservation to its inclusion in teaching materials (textbooks), whereas it should also encompass digital platforms and various artistic forms to enhance accessibility and engagement (Galla, 2009; Wicaksono et al., 2020).

## How the Local Context is Acknowledged in Culturally Relevant Teaching Materials

In the dimension of culturally responsive teaching materials, regional policy initiatives extend beyond textbooks to include tools and infrastructure that shape local context learning, integrating both curricular and co-curricular activities. Other supplementary learning materials, such as movies, videos, and other digital resources, have become more common in education, contributing to better learning outcomes, especially when well designed and aligned with core instructional content (Adams, 2021; Bamber & Tett, 2010; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).



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East Java Regional Regulation No. 11/2017 on Education Implementation, Article 55, mandates the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure to support local wisdom-based education, ensuring that schools integrate cultural learning into daily activities. This has been implemented through cultural festivals in East Java that involve primary school students, such as *Tempoe Dulu Festival* in Malang and *Gandrung Sewu Festival* in Banyuwangi (Ismain, 2010; Scholihah et al., 2023). Furthermore, to increase local-content textbook availability, the government also provides material support through the East Java Provincial Language Center, which offers online-accessible and downloadable educational resources (Balai Bahasa Jatim, 2023).

In practice, East Java has a diverse range of relevant learning resources, including designated spaces for cultural activities, such as fields for traditional games during physical education lessons and stages for dance lessons and cultural performances (Dawana et al., 2023; Handayani & Iswaningtyas, 2020; Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024). These facilities ensure that students actively participate in cultural learning through hands-on experiences (Manuputty et al., 2023). Schools integrate digital tools such as projectors and speakers to boost student engagement in cultural education. Teachers also use digital platforms for language instruction through singing, making learning more interactive and immersive (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024).

East Java Regional Regulation No. 11/2017 acknowledges the provision of educational infrastructure but fails to include teacher training programs to ensure the effective integration of related materials into classroom instruction. Teachers must be equipped with expertise in their respective fields and the skills necessary to support students' cognitive, physical, and emotional development. This includes pedagogical abilities, subject matter proficiency, knowledge of psychology and child development, creative and innovative teaching methods, as well as training in community engagement (Rao et al., 2024). Without adequate guidance, the resources provided may not be utilized to their full potential, limiting their impact on student learning.

In NTT, teaching materials primarily focus on intracurricular learning, with an emphasis on textbooks and learning modules that define which cultural values and regional knowledge should be preserved. East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Regulation No. 11/2019 on Education Implementation, Article 74, mandates that local content curricula be provided to help students understand regional potentials, preserve traditions, and develop local wisdom. At the city/district level, Kupang Regulation No. 7/2016 on Education Management, Article 54, emphasizes that the curriculum must also incorporate aspects of local wisdom. Schools in NTT thus primarily rely on textbooks that introduce local contexts, which teachers often utilize through storytelling or historical narratives (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024; Lunn & Bishop, 2006).

The provision of local context learning materials in NTT relies on public-private partnerships, with the NTT Provincial Language Center (*Balai Bahasa Provinsi NTT* or *BBP NTT*) collaborating with private sector organizations, civil society organizations, and international aid donors to expand access to educational materials. One such effort has produced 58 children's stories in 34 regional languages, supporting language preservation and providing teacher resources (Antaranews, 2024). East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Regulation No. 11/2019, Article 76, states that local content education is supported by textbooks, although ensuring the availability of local content textbooks remains a challenge (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024).



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Technology offers an alternative for accessing learning materials (Interview with Local Government in NTT, 2024), but the limited infrastructure in NTT poses challenges in terms of expanding resources beyond textbooks. This limits innovation in teaching, as online platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar, which are designed not only to distribute learning materials but also to facilitate the exchange of local context-based resources, remain underutilized. As a result, teachers lack access to diverse, interactive, and culturally relevant materials, reducing their opportunities to integrate local wisdom and regional knowledge into daily lessons.

## Culturally Relevant Teaching Applications in Project-Based Learning

Within the framework of culturally relevant teaching projects, regional regulatory provisions support the integration of character-related education into project-based activities. This initiative aims to enhance student engagement and cultivate cultural talents, ensuring that learning experiences are both interactive and contextually meaningful.

Project-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach that actively involves learners in collaborative group work, allowing them to engage in real-world scenarios where they construct knowledge that holds personal significance (Moursund, 1999; Smith et al., 1993). Moreover, PBL has been shown to enhance students' motivation to learn by fostering a sense of ownership and meaningful participation in the learning process (Tamim & Grant, 2013).

In practice, PBL is widely implemented in schools through P5, which includes activities such as farming, practicing local music, cooking traditional foods, crafting, organizing cultural events and exhibitions, and entrepreneurship (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). P5 allows students to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, reinforcing character development while utilizing the surrounding environment as a primary learning resource (MoECRT, 2022).

In both East Java and NTT, regional education policies integrate curricular and extracurricular activities to promote character development, regional identity, and cultural preservation. In Malang, for example, Malang Regional Regulation No. 2/2019, which amends Regional Regulation No. 3/2014 on the Education Administration System (Article 37), requires schools to incorporate such activities. A notable implementation can be observed in terms of primary education in East Java, where students engage in environmental projects such as farming, hydroponics, plastic sorting, and eco-brick making (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024). These initiatives not only instill environmental responsibility but also nurture discipline, teamwork, and accountability among students (Khosiah, 2017).

The regulation of extracurricular activities is outlined in MoECRT Regulation No. 12/2024 on Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education. This regulation provides clear guidelines on the types of activities, mechanisms, supporting resources, involved stakeholders, and evaluation processes, although its implementation remains national rather than regional.

Extracurricular activities in primary schools face distinct challenges across regions. In NTT, schools struggle with a shortage of instructors, often relying on regular teachers or forgoing extracurricular programs due to budget constraints (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024).



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By contrast, infrastructure limitations in East Java hinder cultural extracurricular activities, as schools lack essential musical instruments (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024).

Both PBL and extracurricular programs often encounter challenges in appointing instructors due to the ongoing teacher shortage. The urgency to allocate teachers for extracurricular activities remains low as long as other educational priorities are deemed more pressing (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). Region-specific policies, including provisions for local content teachers, are essential for the effective implementation of CRL Strategies such as recruiting skilled extracurricular instructors and ensuring fair compensation can enhance the sustainability of these programs.



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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE LEARNING THROUGH SCHOOL AUTONOMY

The Cultural Development Index (CDI) measures inclusive learning environment that enables students to actively develop their potential in the arts, culture, and language. Previously, in 2022, the highest national CDI score was recorded in the education dimension, reaching 72.53 points, which was categorized as “good” (Katadata, 2023). From an educational perspective, the CDI indicates that efforts to mainstream culturally responsive education have been progressing well.

The previous section has shown how school autonomy can support the adaptation of learning into the local contexts to enhance literacy and student engagement. Regional regulations provide a framework that outlines the values and contextual elements that can be incorporated across intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. Ultimately, the effectiveness of local context integration depends on schools' capacity to actively embed these elements into all aspects of learning. Two sets of factors, that are central to the concept of School Autonomy, provide the catalyst for enlarging the school's capacity for CRL integration.

### School Principals as Learning Managers to Envision CRL at the School Level

School principals have the following duties:<sup>14</sup> (1) program planning, (2) implementation of work plans, (3) monitoring and evaluation, (4) school leadership, and (5) management of information systems (MoECRT, 2017). Therefore, school principals play a crucial role in shaping and embedding local values and contextual learning within the school curriculum, ensuring that educational practices reflect and preserve cultural identity while fostering an inclusive learning environment. In this context, principals must navigate the cultural diversity of their students while employing teaching strategies that promote inclusivity.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) identify six key characteristics of culturally responsive teachers: socio-cultural awareness, affirmation of student diversity, confidence in the role, understanding how students construct knowledge and promoting independent learning, familiarity with students' lifestyles, and the ability to incorporate such understanding into a meaningful learning plan. A culturally responsive teacher education can not only improve awareness and respect for students' diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds but also contribute to improved learning outcomes (Musana, 2011), such as improving literacy development among students who primarily speak their mother tongue. These essential traits should be recognized in both formal and informal teacher training programs.

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<sup>14</sup> MoEC Regulation No. 6/2018 and Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 58/2017 define the key responsibilities of school principals, including (1) developing a four-year medium-term work plan; (2) formulating an annual work plan; (3) designing the curriculum; (4) managing teacher and staff roles; (5) signing diplomas and academic documents; (6) promoting entrepreneurial values; and (7) evaluating teacher and staff performance (MoEC, 2017).



However, many teachers are not yet accustomed to student-centered learning approaches and face challenges in integrating local wisdom and cultural diversity into instructional materials (Frumensius et al,2020; Lase et al.,2024). Additionally, teachers continue to struggle with translating the philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum into contextually relevant teaching practices (Kusumawardhani et al., 2024).

Integrating cultural competence into teacher education serves as an effective entry point for enhancing teachers' awareness of diversity. Currently, formal training on pedagogical knowledge is provided through Teacher Education Providers (*Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan* or LPTK) via the Teacher Professional Education (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru* or PPG) pathway. Structurally, this training does not specifically focus on integrating local contexts; rather, the core emphasis is on equipping teachers with the diagnostic skills necessary to make learning more relevant to students' needs.

Informal training formats, unlike those relevant to the LPTK and PPG, provide more opportunities for teachers to engage in focused discussions on integrating local contexts across various subjects. Informal outreach through teacher capacity-building programs based on *Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* (MGMP) or *Kelompok Kerja Guru* (KKG) has proven effective and should be further developed, particularly to disseminate the practice of mother tongue instruction in early grade learning in NTT (Balai Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan NTT [BPMP NTT], 2021).

However, informal education relies heavily on teachers' initiative at the local level to initiate discussions, while support from the private sector and government institutions, such as the BPMP, plays a crucial role in facilitating training (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024). Consequently, these training sessions tend to lack regularity, leading to inconsistencies in implementation, limited reach, and varying levels of effectiveness in equipping teachers with the ability to integrate local contexts into their teaching practices.

### Case Study 1.

#### School Principal as Learning Manager for a Customized Curriculum

SDN Sisir 3 Batu has a customized curriculum tailored to the differentiation of students' needs, as initiated by the school principal, who takes on the role of "learning manager." The customized curriculum is used as the school's roadmap and written based on the *Rapor Pendidikan* evaluation achievement, as well as on the school principal's and teachers' reflections. This initiative is underlined by the belief that all students are special; thus, the learning process should be able to accommodate their needs to enhance both academic and character development.

This curriculum is manifested through the *buku panduan kurikulum* (curriculum guidebook), which consists of the school's vision and mission, a customized and detailed learning plan, and the budget allocation to extracurricular and school activities per one school year. Additionally, character development aspects, such as tolerance, equality, and anti-bullying, are integrated into all the materials and learning processes. In this book, the school principal also details the special program for enhancing teachers' skills



competence, as established through the school's internal learning community, named "TIP ESSIGA SEHATI" (*Tanya Inspirasi Pagi SDN Sisir 3 Sinau Empati untuk Hadirkan Agency dan Tindakan Inspiratif*), as this program consists of teacher discussion, coaching, and sharing of good practice, which results in great collaboration and coordination in the school.

The school principal collaborates with parents and committees in the curriculum-making process by discussing "what is your expectation for the school?" with the parents. Through this mechanism, parents are welcomed into monitoring and offering recommendations concerning the learning process. It is also worth noting that students themselves have opportunities to add input to the learning process through filling out online surveys about their expectations for the school, environment, and friends, with the aim being to make sure that students' perspectives are included. Lastly, the school supervisor (appointed by Dinas Pendidikan) engages in continuous coordination with the school principal in terms of supervising the curriculum-making and learning processes, leading to clear coordination between the school and local government.

## Collaboration and Engagement between School and Stakeholders

The decentralization of education was first introduced by Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Autonomy, which granted schools and local governments greater opportunities for collaboration. Such collaboration between schools not only helps address challenges but also encourages the development of more relevant and innovative learning programs while strengthening relationships with stakeholders such as parents, the community, and the private sector (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

However, this study found that parents from lower-income families often prioritize work in order to meet their basic needs, leaving them with little time to participate in school activities or provide learning support at home. In some cases, parents ask their children to skip school, while others encourage their children to work alongside them (Interview with School Leaders in NTT, 2024). Low socio-economic conditions and limited parental awareness of education, as encountered in NTT, represent common challenges that hinder schools' ability to effectively collaborate with parents in supporting students' development (Ankrum, 2016; Cetin & Taskin, 2016). In addition, teachers often face challenges in organizing effective partnership programs, requiring extra time and extensive technical assistance to implement collaborative initiatives successfully (Eipstein, 2005; Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024).

The most immediate entry point for collaboration at the school level is through parents, as outlined in MoEC Regulation No. 75/2016 on School Committees, which aims to improve the overall quality of education. According to Article 10 of this regulation, the role of school committees is specifically directed toward mobilizing funding and other educational resources to fulfill their function in providing support related to personnel, infrastructure, and educational oversight.

MoEC Regulation No. 75/2016 on School Committees, Article 1, defines school committees as independent institutions comprising parents or guardians, the school community, and education-



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focused community leaders. Considering the limited parental involvement that is often due to socio-economic constraints, school committee membership should be expanded beyond parents. Involving a broader range of stakeholders, including community leaders and education advocates, would enhance school governance, strengthen resource mobilization, and ensure more inclusive decision-making to support student learning outcomes.

In practice, there are several ways to ensure broader participation and involvement from parents and others in implementing CRL. Regular consultations with parents and the community provide input on school activities and financial support (Interview with School Leaders in East Java, 2024). In East Java, initiatives such as *Forum Peduli* appoint class representatives to bridge school needs, facilitate fundraising, and secure sponsorships through external collaboration. For PBL that demands additional resources, leveraging support from parent-owned local businesses could enhance in-school initiatives, such as cultural food preparation, fostering community engagement and resource sustainability (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024).

Revitalizing school committees is crucial to strengthening their role in monitoring, advising, and supporting schools in improving education quality. This revitalization process requires clear role definitions among stakeholders to align with school curriculum goals. A key step toward this is consistent commitment to socializing school committee regulations, led by local government, to local stakeholders—including school supervisors, education leaders, community leaders, and parents—to clarify responsibilities and strengthen collaborative support for school initiatives (Safitri & Fauzi, 2022). Regular meetings and discussions are essential to maintaining alignment between school objectives and stakeholder engagement (Maula & Noviyanti, 2024). These forums strengthen role clarity, address educational challenges, and sustain collaborative efforts to improve learning outcomes.

Schools differentiate their engagement strategies based on community characteristics to achieve CRL learning outcomes. In low-income areas with limited parental involvement, some schools collaborate with external stakeholders to provide mother tongue literacy materials. Others engage community groups beyond parents to support extracurricular activities requiring additional funding or cultural expertise. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2004) emphasizes village communities as key entry points for collaboration to effectively address school needs. Box Case Study 2 shows how schools engage in cross-collaboration and community involvement based on the curriculum they implement.

“Revitalizing school committees is crucial to strengthening their role in monitoring, advising, and supporting schools in improving education quality.”



## Case Study 2. Community Engagement in School Activities

In delivering meaningful learning experiences for students, SDN 2 Bulukerto Batu has many initiatives that involve collaborating with various representatives of education stakeholders. Each partnership is strategically designed to achieve specific CRL objectives. Before each academic term, the school reviews the stakeholder roles and objectives to ensure alignment with its goals, ensuring that learning remains contextually relevant and responsive to local needs.

Students participate in *Slametan Desa*, a traditional Javanese ceremony expressing gratitude to God. Their involvement fosters cultural appreciation, with the parents' committee supporting the budget allocation for participation. The school also partners with local dance workshops (*sanggar*) to teach traditional dances such as *Bantengan* and *Kuda Lumping*. Through direct learning from cultural practitioners, students gain familiarity with the dances' properties, staging, and costumes. This collaboration addresses the infrastructure and resource limitations that often hinder CRL implementation.

To further integrate the local context into learning, the school principal engages in discussions with community groups such as the village's Family Welfare Empowerment (*Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*) organization, mosque members (*Jamaah Masjid*), and other local leaders to explore collaborative opportunities.

These partnerships are regularly reviewed and communicated through meetings to reinforce stakeholder roles and align contributions with educational goals.

**The role of local governments in mobilizing school communities is crucial in collectively assessing educational outcomes and formulating locally relevant solutions.**

School committees help schools shape their collaboration strategies within the school environment. However, teacher competency serves as both an opportunity and a challenge when engaging external stakeholders. Barriers include parental absenteeism, limited community participation, and the absence of government-supported frameworks for inclusive collaboration (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). In the absence of strong external partnerships, schools rely on inter-school cooperation to effectively implement culturally responsive curricula. Therefore, fostering community collaboration requires a more systematic approach under the supervision of local government authorities.

Currently, assessment policies such as the *Rapor Pendidikan Daerah* (Regional Report Card) serve as a key tool to help teachers interpret educational priorities, including the implementation of culturally responsive learning. However, challenges persist, as the *Rapor Pendidikan Daerah* often lacks contextualized recommendations, making it difficult for schools—despite having full autonomy in lesson planning—to effectively utilize the evaluation results (Interview with School Leaders in East Java and NTT, 2024). Therefore, the role of local governments in mobilizing school communities is crucial in collectively assessing educational outcomes and formulating locally relevant solutions.



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## CONCLUSION

School autonomy is expected to promote equitable access to quality education, fostering the development of well-rounded student performance, and more importantly, greater contextual learning through an adaptive curriculum with a CRL approach. However, its implementation remains suboptimal, particularly in schools facing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortages of qualified teachers, and language barriers in the learning process.

While CRL offers a promising framework for inclusive education, its effectiveness depends on teacher readiness and community collaboration to support its implementation across diverse regions. At the regional level, CRL is implemented by granting schools autonomy to incorporate native languages into the instruction, integrate local values and traditions into the curriculum, and provide materials and tools that support local context-based learning.

Teacher training and development play a significant role in the successful implementation of CRL. Strengthening the integration of local contexts into teacher education requires a structured approach that balances formal and informal training. While formal training through the LPTK and PPG equips teachers with essential pedagogical knowledge for developing diagnostic learning strategies that are tailored to diverse student backgrounds, informal training programs such as the MGMP and KKG provide spaces for collaborative discussions on local context integration. Government agencies, including the BPMP, and private sector actors play a crucial role in supporting these initiatives by facilitating structured training, providing resources, and offering incentives to ensure teachers actively engage in professional development opportunities.

Expanding collaboration beyond parental engagement is crucial to ensuring effective school governance. MoEC Regulation No. 75/2016 on School Committees permits the inclusion of members beyond parents, providing an opportunity to enhance educational support. Revitalizing school committees by actively collaborating beyond parents strengthens school governance and ensures the strategic integration of local communities in supporting holistic and contextually relevant education. This can be achieved through regulation socialization for school committees that are open to community stakeholders, regular meetings, and active stakeholder engagement to clarify roles and strengthen collaboration.

Investment in educational facilities, teaching materials, and technologies can create a more culturally responsive learning environment. In promoting this, the 2025–2045 Education Roadmap should outline the commitment to improving educational infrastructure.

Ultimately, school autonomy must be accompanied by accountability, particularly by strengthening the role of local governments in engaging school communities to interpret educational objectives effectively. One approach is to involve a broader range of stakeholders in analyzing the *Rapor Pendidikan Daerah*, ensuring that the proposed learning strategies are more contextually relevant, including those that align with local cultural contexts.



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