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Content Differentiation in Local-Wisdom-Based Islamic Religious Education Modules: A Curriculum Management Case Study in an Indonesian Vocational School

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's curriculum reform gives schools the flexibility to contextualize learning, yet the rich local culture of provinces such as Bengkulu is seldom drawn on in teaching. Islamic Religious Education often presents doctrinal content with little contextual relevance for diverse learners. This study examines how content differentiation is implemented in local-wisdom-based IRE modules and which school-level factors facilitate or hinder the process. A qualitative single-case study was conducted over one academic semester at a state vocational secondary school in Bengkulu, involving IRE teachers, students, the principal, and the curriculum team. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis; they were analyzed through coding, and triangulation was used to enhance trustworthiness. Teachers differentiated content through three mechanisms: integrating local values into instructional content, using local visual and narrative media, and adjusting textual complexity to learner readiness. Before inclusion, cultural content was screened for doctrinal consistency, curricular alignment, and feasibility. Students reported greater engagement, easier comprehension, and a sense of cultural identity, although no learning outcomes were measured. Implementation was constrained by uneven teacher skills, limited cultural documentation, and weaker cultural ties among non-local students. On this basis, the study proposes a provisional five-layer culturally differentiated curriculum management framework that links cultural assets, governance, translation, enactment, and meaningful learning through management and feedback loops. Content differentiation based on local wisdom thus appears to operate as a systemic curriculum management process that depends on institutional capacity, not on teacher initiative alone.

Keywords: *Content Differentiation, Local Wisdom, Curriculum Management, Islamic Religious Education, Vocational School*

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesian vocational secondary schools faces challenges due to a uniform curriculum applied to students with diverse abilities. The core issue is curriculum management; schools have formal discretion under the Merdeka Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*; Independent Curriculum) but lack clear guidelines for content adaptation (Kristiani et al., 2021). Uniform methods conflict with IRE's role in moral and character development, which requires learner-sensitive approaches rooted in Islamic philosophy of education (Cahyani & Masyithoh, 2023; Ratnasari et al., 2020). National policy promotes deep learning (*pembelajaran mendalam*) focused on meaningful education connected to learners' cultural and social contexts (Kompas.com, 2025a, 2025b; Tempo.co, 2025). Despite ministerial support and investment in teacher training (ANTARA, 2026), implementation guidance remains weak. This study proposes a provisional, case-based framework to improve curriculum management.

Scholarship on differentiated instruction defines key learner dimensions (readiness, interest, and learning profile) that guide adaptations in content, process, and product (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Its implementation varies due to curricular and resource constraints and is influenced by teachers' interest (Grecu, 2023; Pozas et al., 2022). A meta-analysis has associated differentiation with improved achievement and attitudes (Safawi & Akay, 2022), while personalization enhances self-regulation (De Urraza et al., 2023). In Indonesia, differentiated learning under the Merdeka Curriculum has been documented in primary and IRE contexts, where it is associated with higher achievement and better learning outcomes (Aisyah et al., 2024; Anuar & Dafit, 2025; Asrori & Saputro, 2025). This approach rejects the notion of an average learner by emphasizing learner variance amid evolving sociotechnical conditions (Tomlinson, 2017; Twining et al., 2021).

The cultural literature centers on local wisdom, that is, the communal knowledge and values preserved within particular territories, and on its curricular integration as a means of maintaining identity while upholding national standards (Fathurrochman et al., 2026; Njatrijani, 2018). Embedding indigenous knowledge formally, rather than as an appendage, ensures its longevity in schools (Dasilva et al., 2023). Ethnopedagogical research affirms cultural practice as a valid instructional resource across educational phases and highlights models for curricular innovation and the revitalization of tribal wisdom (Hasan et al., 2024; Mimin, 2021; Rasidi et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2025). The concept of funds of knowledge legitimizes household and community practices as intellectual capital (Moll et al., 1992), a concept that indigenous pedagogy scholarship has extended to place-based teaching (Jaiswal, 2025). Despite its rapid growth, the field remains predominantly descriptive rather than managerial (Zhou & Saearani, 2025).

Bengkulu provides rich material for cultural integration in education, notably the Tabot commemoration, which has evolved into a provincial heritage event and was proposed for intangible heritage status over a decade ago. The province also preserves distinctive cultural practices and Islamic heritage sites (ANTARA, 2025a; ANTARA Bengkulu, 2015, 2026). Despite expanding national heritage policies and pedagogical frameworks supporting curriculum flexibility through modules (Kristiani et al., 2021), the systematic integration of local wisdom into IRE modules.

The literature reveals three gaps: the pedagogical literature on differentiation addresses what to adapt but neglects institutional governance; the local-wisdom literature catalogs cultural content but rarely clarifies the criteria for its legitimacy in religious education; and integration of the two fields is minimal, with studies often treating differentiation merely as delivery rather than as intertwined processes of cultural selection and pedagogical calibration. Culturally relevant pedagogy offers limited guidance on governing the selection of cultural content, particularly in religious subjects constrained by doctrine. Although Islamic legal thought permits local custom (*'urf*) within sharia limits (*al-'adah muhakkamah*), school-level procedures for incorporating custom into the curriculum are underdeveloped (Biesta et al., 2015; Gay, 2018; Kristiani et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Priestley et al., 2012).

Evaluative research highlights a persistent need to develop pedagogical competence among IRE teachers (Bahrissalim & Fauzan, 2018), raising the question of how schools translate formal curricular discretion into consistent, quality-assured practice. This study examines (1) how IRE teachers apply content differentiation using Bengkulu local wisdom, (2) the criteria and validation processes employed to integrate cultural material into teaching modules, and (3) the managerial factors, such as leadership, capacity, documentation, and peer validation, that enable or constrain this practice. Employing inductive coding alongside theoretical concepts, the study develops a provisional, layered framework that conceptualizes culturally grounded differentiation as an institutionalized curricular process rather than a mere instructional strategy.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative single-case design to investigate the enactment and management of a bounded institutional practice, focusing on a locally grounded IRE teaching module within a state vocational secondary school in Bengkulu Province. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth, contextual understanding of participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2016), while the case-study format preserved the module's inseparability from its school environment (Yin, 2018). The school was purposively selected on the basis of three criteria: the development of an IRE module grounded in local wisdom, use of the module for

more than one academic term, and an active curriculum development team addressing managerial and instructional concerns. Fieldwork spanned one academic semester and covered the module's planning, delivery, and evaluation phases.

Participants were purposively selected to encompass curricular decision-making roles: IRE teachers responsible for module design and implementation; grade XI students as module users; the school principal overseeing instruction; and curriculum team members managing validation and institutional memory. This multi-perspective sampling enabled cross-verification of individual practice against institutional governance. Data collection employed semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and the principal to capture practices of content differentiation; non-participant classroom observations to document teaching and engagement; and document analysis of teaching materials to assess the integration of local wisdom and differentiation (Sugiyono, 2017; Wasil, 2022). Interviews were recorded and transcribed, observations were recorded systematically in field notes, and documents were coded.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2018). Themes were developed through coding stages inspired by grounded theory (open, axial, and selective coding) and refined using the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness was enhanced through source and method triangulation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Open coding matrix: interview excerpts, codes, and research context

No	Interview excerpt (condensed)	Code	Research context
1	*"I cannot give the same text to all of them; some read it once and understand, some cannot finish one paragraph."*	Recognition of readiness disparity	Teacher's diagnostic reasoning prior to module design
2	*"So I prepare three versions of the reading—simple, standard, and extended—about the same material."*	Tiering of textual complexity	Content differentiation by readiness
3	*"Those who like drawing make an infographic; those who like writing make a reflection essay."*	Choice-based product routing	Content differentiation by interest and profile
4	*"When I explain akhlak using makan bajamba, they immediately have something to say."*	Cultural anchoring of abstract doctrine	Local wisdom as entry point to normative content
5	*"Not every tradition can go into the module; we check first whether it conflicts with syariah."*	Doctrinal screening of cultural material	Curricular translation and validation
6	*"We discuss it in the curriculum team before it becomes part of the module."*	Collegial validation of content	School curriculum governance

No	Interview excerpt (condensed)	Code	Research context
7	*"The hardest part is finding written sources about our own traditions."*	Documentation scarcity	Constraint on cultural sourcing
8	*"I learned differentiation from a short workshop; it was not enough to design a whole module."*	Insufficient design training	Constraint on teacher capacity
9	*"Students from outside Bengkulu are less connected to Tabot than the local ones."*	Uneven cultural attachment	Constraint arising from learner heterogeneity
10	*"The principal asks us to report the module in the school curriculum document."*	Institutional codification	Managerial enablement
11	*"PAI [IRE] feels closer now; it is about things we actually do at home."*	Perceived proximity of content	Student response to contextualization
12	*"If there is a video or a local story, I understand faster than reading the Arabic text."*	Multimodal access to normative texts	Student response to differentiated media
13	*"I am proud that our own tradition is discussed in a religion lesson."*	Cultural belonging and pride	Affective outcome of integration
14	*"We evaluate at the end of the unit and revise the module for next semester."*	Iterative module revision	Reflective feedback within governance

Enacting content differentiation within the teaching module

Triangulated evidence from interviews, observations, and document analysis showed that IRE teachers had operationalized content differentiation by adjusting instructional materials to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. The modules offered several alternative learning activities, from reading narratives of local culture and composing religious reflections drawn from everyday experience to producing creative work, such as poetry or posters, that linked Islamic values to Bengkulu traditions. Observation notes indicated that these alternatives were enacted rather than merely documented. Learners with a visual orientation were directed toward infographic tasks, whereas those with a stronger textual orientation wrote essays or summaries. Allocating tasks in this way did not dilute the shared learning objective, which remained constant across routes. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesian vocational secondary schools faces challenges due to a uniform curriculum applied to students with diverse abilities. The core issue is curriculum management; schools have formal discretion under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Analysis of the modules and field notes indicated that this enactment proceeded through three converging mechanisms. The first embedded local values in reading texts, exercise items, and case studies. Values such as mutual assistance, deliberation, and filial propriety were presented as locally realized expressions of Islamic teaching rather than as civic virtues standing alongside it. When *akhlak* (moral character) was the topic, learners analyzed Bengkulu folk narratives and customary practices for their spiritual and social content, and exercise items drew on

locally recognizable religious experience, such as the distribution of *zakat fitrah* (almsgiving at the end of Ramadan) through customary institutions or the conduct of *qurban* (ritual sacrifice) in village communities. The second mechanism relied on visual and narrative local media. Images of vernacular mosque architecture, customary Muslim dress, and depictions of local religious figures served as instructional material, and short narratives about how Islam spread in Bengkulu through cultural channels reinforced an understanding of *dakwah* (Islamic propagation) as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) while also building pride in local history. In the third mechanism, teachers calibrated the complexity of material to learner capability. When the pillars of faith were taught, learners with foundational understanding received simplified texts and items, whereas more advanced learners were assigned project tasks such as producing a short video on community religious practice or writing an interpretive reflection on Islamic values within local tradition. Peer teaching, group discussion, and role play based on culturally rooted Islamic narratives supported this work.

This enactment closely matches the canonical account of differentiation as adaptation to readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson et al., 2003), but the case adds a qualification that the account does not anticipate. Here, differentiation was not a neutral technical adjustment. Because the material through which it was carried out was culturally specific, selecting that material had doctrinal consequences, and the teachers' work was therefore curatorial as well as pedagogical.

Curricular translation of the Bengkulu cultural repertoire

Document analysis showed that cultural material did not enter the module directly. Instead, it passed through a screening sequence that participants described in broadly similar terms across roles. A candidate practice was tested first for congruence with Islamic teaching, then for fit with an existing learning objective, and then for instructional feasibility given the available time and resources. Only after passing these tests was it codified into the module and submitted to the curriculum team for validation. Coded excerpts 5 and 6 in Table 1 capture the first two moments of this sequence, and excerpt 10 its institutional closure. The sequence accounts for an otherwise puzzling observation, namely that the province's cultural repertoire is far larger than the set of practices that appear in the module: selection was governed rather than opportunistic.

Participants described the screening in general terms (excerpt 5); written criteria, decision records, and examples of rejected material were. Tabot, which commemorates the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandsons and whose ritual forms are understood differently across communities, illustrates why explicit criteria

matter. Table 2 reproduces the integration mapping that the teachers developed in the module.

Table 2. Integration of learning objectives, Bengkulu local wisdom, and IRE content

Learning objective	Bengkulu local wisdom value	IRE content
Explain the importance of praiseworthy character in communal life	*Makan bajamba* tradition (togetherness, equality)	Character toward fellow human beings (QS Al-Hujurat: 13; HR Ahmad)
Identify forms of Islamic values reflected in local culture	Tabot commemoration (sacrifice, love for the Prophet's family, spiritual commitment)	Exemplarity of Islamic figures and Islamic history
Demonstrate respect, tolerance, and cooperation in social life	Bengkulu regional dances, Andun and Putri Gading Cempaka (propriety, appreciation of Islamically inflected art)	Manners and ethics in Islam
Cultivate gratitude and social concern	Bengkulu culinary heritage: *lemang tapai*, *kue tat*, *gelamai* (gratitude, cleanliness, sharing)	Character toward the environment and sustenance
Appreciate local history and the role of community figures in propagating Islamic values	Local figures and sites, including Syekh Burhanuddin and Fort Marlborough	History of the spread of Islam in Indonesia and the role of local scholars

The mapping shows that integration operated at the level of curricular architecture rather than illustration. Each cultural entry is bound to a stated objective and to a specific body of religious content, so removing it would leave a gap in the curriculum, not merely a less colorful lesson. Review evidence identifies exactly this condition—embedding within the formal curriculum rather than appending to it—as what determines whether the integration of indigenous knowledge endures (Dasilva et al., 2023). The finding also echoes the argument that local wisdom integration must be systematized if it is to survive changes in staffing and policy (Fathurrochman et al., 2026).

Several entries draw on traditions shared across the wider Malay–Minangkabau cultural area of Sumatra (for example, *makan bajamba*) or on figures associated with neighboring regions (for example, Syekh Burhanuddin), and one entry is a colonial-era site (Fort Marlborough). The teachers included them as part of the regional Islamic and historical heritage that students encounter, but the Bengkulu provenance of each element should not be assumed. Bengkulu is itself culturally plural (Rejang, Serawai, Lembak, Malay, and Minangkabau communities, among others), and "Bengkulu local wisdom" is used here to denote the repertoire selected by the case school rather than a homogeneous provincial culture.

The cultural material also carries public standing of its own, which strengthened its curricular legitimacy. Tabot is documented as a sacred commemoration of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandsons, enacted through eight successive ritual stages, and is now a marker of provincial identity. It has long been put forward for intangible heritage designation within a national heritage regime that has expanded markedly. Teachers invoked this public standing when justifying inclusion to colleagues and parents. Their reasoning is consistent with the funds-of-knowledge argument that community practice constitutes legitimate intellectual capital (Moll et al., 1992) and with ethnopedagogical accounts of cultural practice as a vehicle for character formation (Sakti et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2025).

Student interviews revealed three analytically distinct responses with differing implications for module design. Engagement through proximity arose from the material's relevance to students' lives, enhancing understanding and emotional attachment (Table 1, excerpt 11). Accessibility through modality benefited those struggling with normative Islamic texts by offering alternative media such as videos and local narratives, thereby improving access, which previous studies have linked to higher achievement and self-regulation (De Urraza et al., 2023; Safawi & Akay, 2022). Belonging through recognition manifested as pride in the inclusion of their tradition in religious education, an outcome predicted more by culturally grounded curriculum research than by differentiation theory (Hasan et al., 2024; Rasidi et al., 2025). These distinctions have managerial consequences: engagement may be transient, accessibility requires consistent resource provision, and belonging depends on sustaining cultural content amid documentation challenges.

Managerial constraints and enabling conditions

Three constraints recurred across the data sources. Teachers needed intensive training to design modules that accommodated content differentiation consistently, since short workshops conveyed the concept without building design competence (excerpt 8). This accords with evidence that differentiation depends on sustained curricular and resource support for teachers rather than episodic training (Grecu, 2023), and with evaluative findings on IRE teacher training curricula (Bahrissalim & Fauzan, 2018). Well-documented local cultural resources were also scarce, which made relevant and verifiable cultural references hard to locate (excerpt 7), and teachers often relied on oral testimony that could not be cited in a formal module. Finally, cultural attachment was unevenly distributed. One participant reported that students from outside the province were less connected to local tradition (excerpt 9). Because this observation rests on a single excerpt, it suggests only tentatively that a strategy designed to promote inclusion may itself create a new margin.

Alongside these constraints, three enabling conditions were identified. Principal-led codification required the module to be registered in the school

curriculum document (excerpt 10), turning individual initiative into institutional property. Collegial validation through the curriculum team spread both doctrinal responsibility and design labor (excerpt 6), in line with evidence associating collaborative school cultures with innovative classroom practice (Blömeke et al., 2021) and with the literature on professional learning communities (Admiraal et al., 2021). Iterative revision at the end of each unit (excerpt 14) created a feedback mechanism through which observed weaknesses were fed back into the design. Taken together, these conditions correspond to what the teacher-agency literature describes as the structural and cultural resources that determine whether teachers can act on their professional intentions (Biesta et al., 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2012), and they accord with leadership research that links instructional leadership capabilities to improvement outcomes (Robinson, 2010).

Despite these constraints, participants generally perceived the strategy as increasing learner involvement and comprehension of Islamic teaching and as making instruction more inclusive and rooted in local values. These judgments reflect perceptions, not measured outcomes.

Discussion

Comparative analysis

Contrasting the case with a conventional uniform module clarifies what content differentiation grounded in local wisdom may change. No data on a conventional module were collected, the conventional configuration in Table 3 is therefore an ideal-typical reference point drawn from the literature and from teachers' general accounts of earlier practice rather than an empirical finding. Table 3 sets the two configurations side by side on the dimensions that emerged from the coding sequence.

Table 3. Conceptual contrast between conventional and locally grounded differentiated IRE modules

Aspect	Conventional uniform module	Local-wisdom-based differentiated module	Analytical implication
Content source	Single national textbook chapter	Textbook plus curated provincial cultural repertoire	Content becomes a curatorial decision requiring screening criteria
Treatment of learner diversity	Diversity absorbed by remediation after failure	Diversity anticipated in design through tiering and routing	Differentiation shifts from remedial to anticipatory function
Textual complexity	One level for all learners	Simplified, standard, and extended variants of one objective	Access is engineered rather than left to learner capability
Learning products	Uniform written task	Choice among essay, infographic, poster, poetry, or video	Product variety carries assessment-design consequences
Position of	Illustrative example,	Structural component	Removal creates a

Aspect	Conventional uniform module	Local-wisdom-based differentiated module	Analytical implication
culture	removable	bound to a learning objective	curricular gap, not merely a duller lesson
Legitimacy mechanism	Textbook authority	Doctrinal screening plus collegial validation	Legitimacy is produced institutionally, not assumed
Locus of responsibility	Individual teacher	Teacher, curriculum team, and principal	Practice becomes institutional property
Evaluation logic	Terminal achievement measurement	Terminal measurement plus module revision cycle	Evaluation feeds design, closing a governance loop
Principal risk	Disengagement of lower-readiness learners	Marginalization of learners without local cultural attachment	Inclusion strategies can generate new exclusions
Sustainability condition	Textbook availability	Documented cultural sources and trained designers	Sustainability depends on capacity, not enthusiasm

The contrast suggests a shift that the differentiation literature, with its focus on classroom technique, tends to leave implicit. Whereas the conventional module locates quality assurance in the authority of a published text, the locally grounded module must generate its own legitimacy through screening and collegial validation. In this configuration, differentiation cannot be delegated to the individual teacher unless curatorial authority is transferred as well, which is why the case is better read as a phenomenon of curriculum management than of instruction. The finding is consistent with accounts of teachers as curriculum makers whose room to maneuver is set by institutional conditions (Priestley et al., 2012) and with evidence that collaboration at the school level underpins innovative practice (Blömeke et al., 2021).

The coding sequence yielded two core themes: content differentiation management (Theme 1) and local wisdom integration (Theme 2). These themes were constructed at the selective-coding stage by grouping the categories reported in the Results. Indicators 7 and 10 in Table 4 are analytical extrapolations that are not directly evidenced by the excerpts presented above. Axial coding showed that the two themes interlock rather than run in parallel, since each indicator of the first is realized through a specific dimension of the second. Table 4 presents this mapping.

Table 4. Indicators of Theme 1 (content differentiation management) and corresponding dimensions of Theme 2 (local wisdom integration)

No	Indicator of Theme 1: Content differentiation management	Dimension of Theme 2: Local wisdom integration
1	Diagnosis of learner readiness prior to design	Selection of culturally familiar entry points for low-readiness learners
2	Tiering of textual complexity across one objective	Graduated cultural narratives, from simple folk story to interpretive tradition
3	Routing of tasks by learner interest	Distribution of cultural forms across ritual,

No	Indicator of Theme 1: Content differentiation management	Dimension of Theme 2: Local wisdom integration
		culinary, performative, and historical domains
4	Accommodation of learning profile through modality	Visual, oral, and narrative local media as parallel representations
5	Preservation of a constant learning objective across routes	Objective–culture mapping that binds each cultural entry to a stated competence
6	Choice-based product specification	Culturally expressive products such as posters, poetry, and community documentation
7	Formative checking during enactment	Communal and dialogical practices repurposed as peer feedback structures
8	Quality assurance of instructional material	Doctrinal screening of cultural practice for congruence with Islamic teaching
9	Institutional codification of the module	Registration of validated cultural content in the school curriculum document
10	Iterative revision after each unit	Progressive documentation of oral cultural sources into citable module material

Selective coding then reduced the two themes to eight substantive pairings (for example, equity of access to a shared learning objective paired with cultural familiarity as a lowered threshold to abstract doctrine, and objective constancy under procedural variation paired with doctrinal congruence as the boundary condition of cultural admission).

Table 4 shows how the two themes fuse. Content differentiation supplies the *procedural grammar* (diagnosis, tiering, routing, calibration, and revision), and local wisdom supplies the *substantive material* on which that grammar operates. Neither suffices on its own. Differentiation without culturally grounded material reproduces the abstraction that alienated lower-readiness learners in the first place, whereas local wisdom without differentiation yields a culturally rich lesson that a substantial part of the class still cannot access. The case therefore supports the argument that indigenous knowledge and the formal curriculum must be structurally coupled rather than juxtaposed (Dasilva et al., 2023; Fathurrochman et al., 2026).

Table 5. Substantive analysis of core categories

A provisional layered framework for culturally differentiated curriculum management

No	Substantive category	Empirical manifestation	Theoretical meaning	Managerial implication
1	Curatorial pedagogy	Teachers select, screen, and codify cultural material before teaching it	Differentiation extends beyond delivery into content authorship	Teacher development must address curriculum design, not only classroom technique
2	Doctrinal boundary work	Cultural practices tested for congruence	Cultural integration in religious education is	Screening criteria should be written, not

No	Substantive category	Empirical manifestation	Theoretical meaning	Managerial implication
		with Islamic teaching prior to admission	bounded, not open-ended	tacit
3	Anticipatory equity	Tiered texts and alternative modalities provided in advance of observed failure	Access is designed rather than remediated	Assessment design must recognize multiple product forms as equivalent
4	Distributed legitimacy	Curriculum team validates cultural content collegially	Instructional legitimacy is institutionally produced	Curriculum teams require formal mandate and scheduled time
5	Institutional codification	Module registered in the school curriculum document	Practice converts from personal initiative to organizational property	Codification protects the practice against staff turnover
6	Documentation dependency	Oral cultural knowledge resists citation in formal modules	Cultural sustainability in curricula is an archival problem	Schools should partner with cultural custodians to build citable repositories
7	Heterogeneity residue	Non-local learners exhibit weaker cultural attachment	Inclusion strategies may generate second-order exclusion	Modules should incorporate comparative and cross-regional cultural entries
8	Reflective closure	Post-unit evaluation feeds module revision	Governance requires a feedback loop, not only a design phase	Revision cycles should be calendared and minuted

The findings are consistent with a layered rather than linear framework in which each layer appears to depend on the one beneath it. This dependency is an analytical inference from participants' accounts rather than a tested relationship. Figure 1 presents this structure in terms of concepts rather than propositions, in keeping with its inductive derivation.

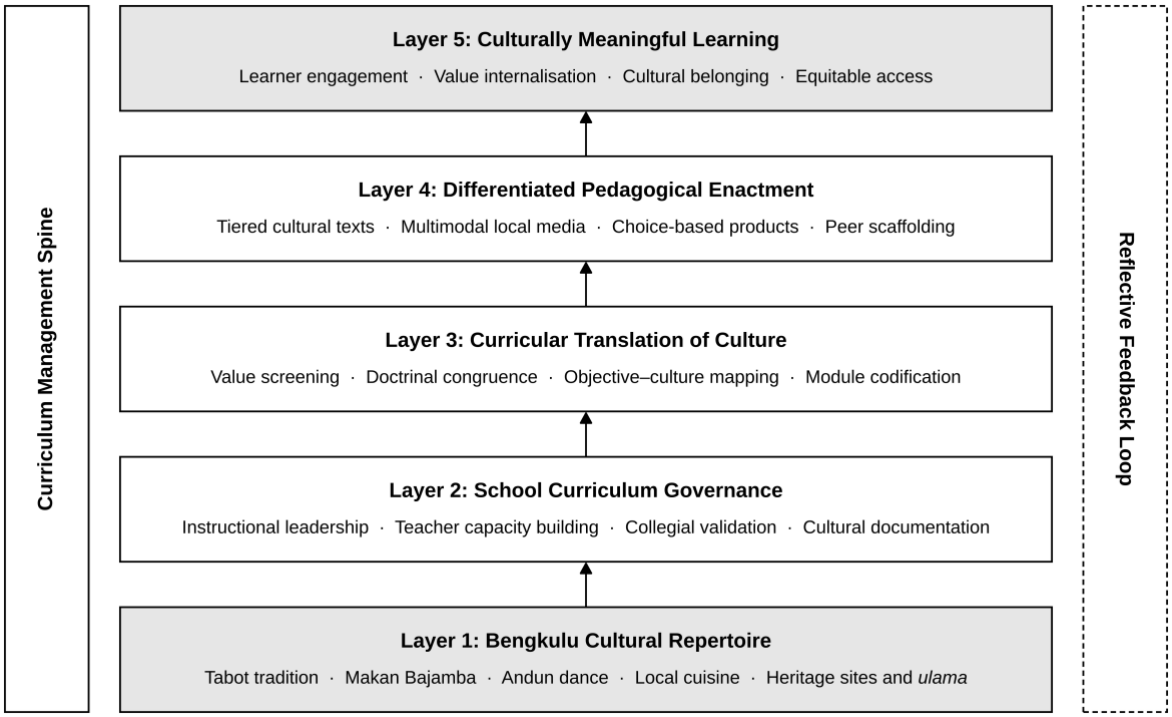


Figure 1. Culturally differentiated curriculum management: a layered framework for local-wisdom-based teaching modules.

The first layer of the framework is the *Bengkulu cultural repertoire* (Tabot, *makan bajamba*, the Andun dance, culinary heritage, and heritage sites and scholarly biographies), which supplies raw substantive material but has no curricular status of its own. That status is conferred in the second layer, *school curriculum governance*, where instructional leadership, teacher capacity building, collegial validation, and cultural documentation determine whether elements of the repertoire can become content. The third layer, *curricular translation of culture*, carries out the conversion through value screening, testing for doctrinal congruence, objective–culture mapping, and module codification. In the fourth layer, *differentiated pedagogical enactment*, teachers apply the procedural grammar of tiered texts, multimodal media, choice-based products, and peer scaffolding. The fifth layer, *culturally meaningful learning*, names the cluster of outcomes that students described: engagement, internalization of values, cultural belonging, and equitable access. Layers 1 and 5 represent, respectively, the inputs and the perceived outcomes of the managed process rather than managerial functions in themselves; the outcomes are based on participants' reports.

The curriculum management spine involves continuous managerial tasks (resourcing, mandating, and supervising) that sustain the upward dependency in educational governance. At the same time, the reflective feedback loop returns evaluative evidence downward to inform governance and enactment. This

bidirectional process, which is central to the framework and remains to be tested empirically, positions culturally grounded differentiation as a cyclical process that depends on the institutional capacity to maintain both functions.

The framework makes three contributions: it specifies the screening criteria absent from the local-wisdom literature; it provides the institutional layer lacking in differentiation research, which often focuses solely on teachers; and it situates both within a management cycle aligned with studies of teacher agency and curriculum leadership (Admiraal et al., 2021; Biesta et al., 2015; Pozas et al., 2022; Robinson, 2010; Tomlinson et al., 2003). In addition, it complements culturally relevant pedagogy by emphasizing the institutional conditions for cultural grounding and aligns with Islamic jurisprudence, which permits local customs within sharia limits (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The results are consistent with the proposition that differentiation seeks equitable access for all learners through attention to readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson et al., 2003), and with contextual approaches holding that learning gains relevance and meaning when it is connected to learners' lived worlds (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The combination of contemporary pedagogical strategy with traditional local values suggests that religious instruction need not be uniform and abstract. Students reported that, when religion was taught within a living, recognizable cultural context, their understanding of Islamic values became more concrete and applicable; this finding supports the culture-based character education agenda set out in national curriculum policy. This reading accords with Indonesian evidence linking differentiated instruction to attainment in Islamic education (Aisyah et al., 2024; Asrori & Saputro, 2025), with work on teaching module design under the Merdeka Curriculum (Kristiani et al., 2021), and with a systematic review of Merdeka Curriculum implementation by IRE teachers (Jasiah et al., 2024).

The case also refines this literature in one respect. Local wisdom is conventionally defined as inherited tradition that carries value content and is transmitted across generations (Njatrijani, 2018; Syaputra, 2019), and studies of its educational use commonly report affective and identity gains (Andriana, 2024; Kurniawan & Halim, 2022). The present findings are consistent with those gains but tie their durability to a mundane variable, namely whether the cultural source can be documented well enough to survive in a formal module. Ethnopedagogical revitalization therefore depends on archival as much as on pedagogical work (Jayantika et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2024; Uswatun et al., 2026). Comparable studies in other domains, such as mathematics (Diputra et al., 2024), science (Ilhami et al., 2021), and early childhood education (Mimin, 2023; Temaja, 2021), likewise indicate that cultural material generally has to be rendered as curriculum-relevant competence before it can function in formal teaching.

This study's conclusions are limited by its single-site focus and its reliance on analytical rather than statistical generalization; its framework should therefore be viewed as a hypothesis to be tested in other provinces and school types. No formal learning outcomes were measured; reported comprehension gains rely on participant perceptions and observations rather than assessment data. Data were predominantly self-reported, with doctrinal screening described in general terms, and the conventional-module configuration in Table 3 was conceptual rather than empirical. The absence of longitudinal follow-up on non-local students leaves the risk of second-order exclusion empirically unverified. Future research should investigate whether cultural repositories extend module longevity, whether cross-regional cultural comparisons reduce attachment gaps, and whether governance predicts the persistence of differentiated practices after teachers depart.

CONCLUSION

This study examined content differentiation in IRE modules based on Bengkulu local wisdom and identified the conditions that govern it. Teachers differentiated content by integrating local cultural elements consistent with Islamic principles—including the Tabot commemoration, *makan bajamba*, regional dance, culinary heritage, and historical sites and figures—into texts, media, and tiered levels of complexity while keeping learning objectives constant. Students perceived that the approach increased their engagement and comprehension and strengthened their cultural pride, although no learning outcomes were measured. The findings suggest that successful differentiation relies on institutional arrangements: cultural content is screened doctrinally and validated collegially, codified in the school curriculum, and refined through revision after each unit. The practice was constrained by limited cultural documentation, insufficient teacher capacity for differentiation, and uneven cultural identification among non-local learners. The proposed five-layer framework conceptualizes culturally grounded content differentiation as a managed curricular process that encompasses cultural assets, governance, translation, enactment, and meaningful learning, and that is sustained by ongoing teacher development, systematic cultural documentation, and institutional support within an adaptive curriculum. For practice, the findings suggest that schools should formalize in writing the criteria for screening cultural material, give curriculum teams a formal mandate and scheduled time, build citable repositories of local cultural sources in collaboration with cultural custodians, and include comparative or cross-regional entries so that non-local students are not marginalized. Because the study is a single-site case based largely on participant perceptions, the framework should be regarded as provisional and tested in other settings.

Author Contributions. WW conceptualized the study, led the fieldwork, and drafted the manuscript; NA designed the data collection instruments and supervised the coding process; PC conducted the document analysis and constructed the analytical tables; RT performed the theoretical synthesis and developed the layered framework; and IU provided comparative international perspective and critically revised the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version.

Informed Consent Statement. Written informed consent was obtained from all adult participants and from the parents or legal guardians of student participants prior to data collection. Every participant was informed of the study's purpose, of the confidential treatment of their data, and of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

Declaration of Generative AI. The authors used a generative artificial intelligence tool solely to improve the readability and language of the manuscript; they subsequently reviewed and edited the resulting text and take full responsibility for the content of this publication. No generative AI was used to produce, analyze, or interpret the research data.

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