

INTEGRATING FISHERS' LOCAL WISDOM INTO THE MERDEKA BELAJAR PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SALTED-FISH PROCESSING AT SMP NEGERI 1 SAMPONNIET

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of fishers' local wisdom into the Merdeka Belajar program through salted-fish processing at SMP Negeri 1 Sampoiniet, Aceh Jaya. A descriptive qualitative design was used. Fieldwork was conducted in April–May 2025 with eight participants: two teachers, three students, one fisher, one community leader, and one parent. Data were obtained through interviews, observation, and program documentation, then analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, comparison across sources, and theme development. The findings show that salted-fish processing was connected with Social Studies, Craft, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. Participants perceived that the activity made learning more contextual, supported appreciation of coastal livelihoods, and introduced product-development possibilities. Sustainability was constrained by limited facilities, weather dependence, uneven teacher readiness, scarce written local-history sources, and mixed social acceptance. The study contributes a school-level account of how community knowledge can be organized as a cross-curricular learning resource while distinguishing participants' perceptions from causal claims about learning outcomes.

Keywords: Coastal community; Contextual learning; Local wisdom; Merdeka Belajar; Salted fish

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning that is relevant to students' lives requires a clear connection between school content and the social settings in which they grow up. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, schools have room to adapt instruction to students' characteristics and their local environment. This flexibility requires schools and teachers to design contextual and collaborative learning experiences that remain aligned with curricular objectives (Rahayu et al., 2022; Sumarsih et al., 2022). At the junior secondary level, implementation continues to be constrained by teacher readiness, the availability of learning resources, and the need to adapt activities to school conditions (Hartawati & Karim, 2024).

Local wisdom is one learning resource embedded in students' everyday lives. It encompasses knowledge, values, practices, and responses developed through intergenerational experience. In education, local elements should not be treated simply as supplementary content; they need to become experiences through which students observe, interpret, and reflect on social practices. Fajarini (2014) and Ramdani (2018) associate such contextualization with character formation and students' connection to community identity. More specifically, Habibullah and Rizal (2024) frame Acehnese local wisdom as a resource for ethnoscience learning. A recent systematic review likewise identifies local wisdom as a bridge between community culture and formal concepts, while emphasizing that outcomes depend on how it is pedagogically integrated (Sihombing et al., 2025).

In Social Studies and history education, the social environment can serve as a learning resource that connects concepts with concrete experience. Ahmal (2017) showed that local community practices and values can be transformed into Social Studies learning resources. Syaputra and Satria (2020) likewise demonstrated the relevance of local traditions as resources for

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history learning. In a junior secondary school context, Nikmah et al. (2020) found that connecting Social Studies content with coastal potential, marine products, and local traditions helped students understand the material, although implementation was limited by time, cost, and the readiness of instructional materials. These studies suggest that local wisdom-based learning requires structured design and community support.

Sampoiniet District in Aceh Jaya Regency is a coastal area where fishing and seafood processing shape the livelihoods of part of the community. One body of knowledge passed down across generations concerns preserving fish through salting and sun-drying. Salted-fish production involves knowledge of ingredient selection, hygiene, salting, drying, storage, and product pricing. The practice also carries accounts of how coastal communities managed their catch when storage technology and access to markets were limited.

Previous studies have discussed local wisdom as a resource for character education, Social Studies, ethnoscience, and contextual learning. However, less attention has been paid to the school-level process by which fishers' preservation knowledge is translated into a cross-curricular activity involving teachers, students, families, and community experts. The novelty of this study lies in documenting that translation process in an Acehnese coastal junior secondary school, including the roles of community partners, participants' interpretations, and implementation constraints. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) describe the integration of fishers' local wisdom through salted-fish processing; (2) identify benefits perceived by teachers, students, parents, and community members; and (3) analyze constraints and conditions for sustaining the program.

2. METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to examine learning activities in the natural setting of a school and its surrounding coastal community (Sugiyono, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Sampoiniet in Aceh Jaya Regency. The site was selected because the school is located near a fishing community and had implemented learning activities that used salted-fish processing as a learning resource.

Fieldwork was conducted in April–May 2025. The eight participants comprised two teachers (Social Studies and Craft), three students from grades VIII and IX, one fisher, one community leader, and one parent. They were included because they had participated directly in, supported, or possessed first-hand knowledge of the program. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of learning and fish-processing practices, and documentation of the program and students' work. Interviews addressed implementation, experiences, perceived benefits, and constraints; observations focused on student participation, processing stages, interactions, and curricular connections. To protect identities in this publication, personal names were replaced with role-based codes: T1–T2, S1–S3, F1, C1, and P1.

Analysis followed a thematic procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). The material was read repeatedly for familiarization; relevant segments were assigned initial codes; codes were compared across interviews, observations, and documents; and related codes were clustered into candidate themes. Themes were then reviewed against the study questions and defined as implementation, perceived benefits, and constraints and sustainability. Source and method triangulation was used by comparing accounts from teachers, students, the parent, and community members with observations and documentation. Interview excerpts clarify interpretations, and claims were bounded by the available qualitative evidence.

Focus	Data sources	Techniques
Program implementation	Teachers, students, fishers, instructional documents	Interviews, observation, documentation
Perceived benefits	Teachers, students, parents, community leader	Interviews and observation
Constraints and sustainability	Teachers, students, fishers, parents	Interviews and documentation

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The School and Coastal Community Context

SMP Negeri 1 Sampoiniet is situated near fishing and seafood-processing activities. Some students are familiar with fishing through relatives or residents in their neighborhoods. This proximity gives the school access to authentic learning resources, including knowledge of salting and drying fish. In the program examined here, these practices were connected to Social Studies, Craft, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5).

For community members, salted-fish production is more than a productive activity. In oral testimony, it was described as a way of preserving catches when cold storage and transportation were not readily available. This memory allows the practice to be examined through economic, technological, and social-historical dimensions; it should not, however, be treated as independently verified historical fact.

Implementing Learning through Salted-Fish Processing

The program combined classroom activities with learning in the community. Teachers introduced the context of fishers' lives and explained the purpose of the activity. Students then worked in groups to observe and perform the stages of fish processing. The activities included washing, salting, arranging fish on drying racks, sun-drying, documenting the process, and presenting the results. Residents' homes or production sites served as learning spaces because the school did not have a dedicated facility for practical work.

The fisher's participation supplied practical expertise about ingredients, work sequences, weather conditions, and spoilage risks. Community partners also made production spaces and equipment available, thereby enabling authentic practice that the school could not provide on its own. Students described the direct activity as easier to follow than book-based explanation alone. These statements indicate engagement from the participants' perspective, not measured improvement in learning outcomes.

In Social Studies, teachers connected preservation methods with the history of coastal communities, technological change, the distribution of marine products, and livelihoods. In Craft, attention was given to processing procedures, hygiene, persistence, packaging, and potential market value. In P5, the activities were linked to teamwork, responsibility, creativity, and concern for the social environment. This cross-curricular pattern extends the role of local wisdom from a cultural object to a context for understanding relationships among knowledge, work, and community life.

These findings align with contextual learning that uses community experience to connect concepts with students' lives (Ramdani, 2018). They also resemble school-based studies in which coastal potential, traditions, and local environmental knowledge became Social Studies or history resources (Ahmal, 2017; Nikmah et al., 2020; Syaputra & Satria, 2020). The Sampoiniet case adds a practical, cross-curricular activity and direct participation by fishers and families. Putri et al. (2023) further show the value of structuring local-wisdom content in learning materials. In another context, an ethnoscience-based model improved learning outcomes but produced only slight collaboration gains, underscoring the need to avoid assuming that every intended outcome improves equally (Fatihatussa'adah et al., 2024).

Benefits Perceived by Participants

The Craft teacher considered students better able to follow the stages of fish processing after participating in the activity. Students did not simply observe; they washed, salted, and dried fish under supervision. Documenting and presenting the results required them to reconstruct the process they had completed. According to the teacher, the activity fostered persistence, careful work, and responsibility. Because the study did not use pre- and post-program measures, these findings should be understood as informants' perceptions and observations rather than evidence of causal effectiveness.

"Making salted fish has historical value because, in the past, this was the main way fishers kept their catch from spoiling before it was sold or consumed" (T1, Social Studies teacher; translated from Indonesian).

An entrepreneurial dimension emerged when students discussed packaging, costs, and possible sales. A ninth-grade student expressed an interest in selling salted fish with friends. This

statement suggests emerging interest but does not establish entrepreneurial competence. The available data more clearly show that the activity created space for students to recognize the economic potential of marine products and consider product development.

The activities also influenced how some students viewed their families' work. One student reported greater respect for his father's occupation as a fisher after recognizing the patience and skills required to process fish. Parents stated that the school activities gave a place to family knowledge that had rarely entered formal learning. These findings support the view that local wisdom can serve as a medium for character education and identity formation when students are given opportunities to understand the values embedded in community practices (Fajarini, 2014; Syaputra & Satria, 2020).

Implementation Constraints and Requirements for Sustainability

The first constraint concerned instructional planning. Teachers reported that not all educators were accustomed to connecting learning outcomes with local contexts. Written sources on local history were also scarce, leaving teachers heavily dependent on interviews with community members. This condition risks producing inconsistent narratives that are difficult to verify. The school needs a mapping of learning outcomes, activity modules, observation sheets, assessment rubrics, and documentation of local knowledge developed jointly by teachers and the community.

The second constraint concerned facilities and environmental conditions. The school lacked a dedicated practice area, drying equipment, and storage space. Drying depended on the weather, while borrowing space or equipment from residents restricted scheduling. The continuation of the program therefore requires flexible scheduling, hygiene and safety procedures, and basic facilities that can be shared.

The third constraint concerned social acceptance. Some students initially viewed fish processing as dirty or low-status work, while some parents believed that learning should take place in the classroom. Informants reported that acceptance began to increase after the purpose of the activity was explained. This situation calls for communication that makes clear how the activity relates to curricular outcomes, local history, life skills, and economic potential. Community participation also requires clear agreements so that local knowledge is respected and partners are not burdened by the activities.

These constraints overlap with reported challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly teacher readiness and resource availability (Hartawati & Karim, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2022; Sumarsih et al., 2022). Nikmah et al. (2020) and Purnani and Mulianingsih (2020) similarly identify practical and instructional constraints in local-wisdom-based Social Studies. Continuity therefore depends on institutional curriculum planning, defined community roles, documentation, and evaluation not individual enthusiasm alone.

6. CONCLUSION

Integrating salted-fish production at SMP Negeri 1 Sampoiniet connected Social Studies, Craft, and P5 with coastal community knowledge. Interviews, observations, and program documentation indicate that participants regarded the activity as contextual, culturally meaningful, and capable of introducing product-development possibilities. These are qualitative perceptions rather than causal evidence of improved achievement.

Sustainability requires curriculum-aligned modules, hygienic procedures, assessment rubrics, basic facilities, verified documentation of oral history, and clear school–community partnerships. Future studies should add repeated observations, student-work rubrics, and outcome measures while preserving the community's role as a knowledge partner.

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