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Transformation of Learning Culture in Indigenous Communities through Sustainable Inclusive Education Programs

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ABSTRACT: *Indigenous communities in Indonesia continuously negotiate traditional adat values against formal education demands, creating tension between cultural preservation and educational access. This study examines how sustainable inclusive education programs transform indigenous learning cultures and identifies community-based strategies that prevent adat identity erosion. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in document study and thematic literature synthesis, this research analyzed studies on Indonesian indigenous communities specifically the Baduy and Papuan groups alongside international scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy using domain and taxonomic analysis. Findings demonstrate, first, that learning-culture transformation occurs through negotiated, incremental accommodation rather than wholesale adoption, exemplified by adat controlled schooling. Second, culturally responsive strategies embedding local wisdom, involving adat leaders as co-designers, and contextualizing learning near customary lands serve as primary mechanisms sustaining long-term inclusion. Third, success hinges on trust building between state actors and adat institutions, mediated by intercultural facilitators and continuous teacher development. The study concludes that sustainable inclusive education for indigenous communities must be conceived as a co-constructed cultural process rather than top-down policy transfer. These insights carry direct implications for teacher preparation, curriculum design, and community-based education policy in pluralistic societies.*

Keywords: *Indigenous Communities; Inclusive Education; Sustainable Education; Learning Culture Transformation; Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as the primary vehicle through which societies transmit knowledge, values, and identity across generations, yet the meaning and legitimacy of "formal" education are rarely uniform across cultural contexts. In pluralistic nations such as Indonesia, where more than seventeen thousand islands host hundreds of ethnic groups and *adat* (customary) communities, the expansion of a standardized national curriculum has repeatedly collided with locally rooted systems of learning that predate the modern school. The global education agenda embodied in Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education that leaves no one behind, and Indonesia's own constitutional mandate obliges the state to guarantee education for every citizen regardless of ethnicity, religion, or geographic isolation. However, the operationalization of inclusion for indigenous communities cannot be reduced to simply extending school buildings and curricula into *adat* territories; it requires an understanding of how learning culture itself is negotiated, resisted, reinterpreted, and eventually transformed within communities that hold their own epistemologies of what it means to learn and to become a knowledgeable person.

The Baduy community of Kanekes Village in Lebak Regency, Banten Province, offers one of the most instructive cases of this negotiation in the Indonesian context. Baduy adat prohibits formal schooling for community members who remain bound to the customary law, yet empirical evidence indicates that learning does occur, albeit through concealed and boundary-located practices rather than open enrolment (Sutoto, 2017). Sutoto (2017) found that transformational community leaders manage this tension through a closed admission system, informal and sometimes disguised attendance at nearby schools, and the deliberate placement of educational activities at the periphery of customary land arrangements that allow motivation to learn to be optimized while the prohibition itself remains formally intact. Comparable dynamics have been documented in studies of Baduy customary law and social control (Sutisna et al., 2023), the historical role of oral literacy traditions in sustaining adat values (Sujana, 2020), and the broader transformation of Baduy legal cultural order under modernization pressures (Mustomi, 2017). These findings collectively suggest that what outsiders

often perceive as resistance to education is, in fact, a sophisticated cultural strategy for controlling the terms of engagement with the formal system.

Beyond Java, similar patterns of negotiated inclusion appear in the education of indigenous peoples in Papua, where community-based educational development is increasingly framed around the social and ecological environment of adat communities rather than a uniform national template (Qomarrullah et al., 2024). International literature reinforces this picture: Castagno and Brayboy (2008) reviewed decades of scholarship on culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth and concluded that meaningful inclusion requires schools to actively counter assimilationist practices rather than merely tolerate cultural difference, while McCarty and Lee (2014) advanced the concept of Indigenous education sovereignty, arguing that sustainable educational transformation must be anchored in a community's right to define its own educational goals, content, and pedagogy. In the Pacific, Ava and Page (2020) demonstrated through the tivaevae model in the Cook Islands that culturally responsive pedagogy can simultaneously deliver quality education and sustain cultural inclusivity, while Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) showed that indigenizing curriculum in Canadian higher education reshapes not only content but also the relational dynamics of teaching and learning. Most recently, Riley and Meston (2025) found that Indigenous educational scholars in Australia understand inclusive pedagogy as inseparable from addressing systemic and everyday exclusion, rather than as an add-on to existing practice.

Despite this growing body of evidence, a gap remains in understanding precisely how sustainable inclusive education programs interact with the internal cultural logic of indigenous communities to produce lasting transformation in learning culture as opposed to superficial or short-lived participation. Much of the existing literature either documents the persistence of *adat* resistance to schooling or advocates normatively for culturally responsive pedagogy, without systematically connecting the two: how does a community's learning culture actually change over time when inclusive education programs are introduced, and what community-based mechanisms allow that change to be sustained rather than rejected or merely performed for external observers? Addressing this gap matters both theoretically,

for the study of educational transformation in plural societies, and practically, for policymakers and educators designing inclusion programs intended to serve *adat* communities without triggering cultural erosion or backlash.

This study therefore addresses two research questions: first, how does the learning culture of indigenous communities shift under the influence of sustainable inclusive education programs; and second, what community-based strategies enable this transformation to occur while preserving core *adat* identity and values. By synthesizing documented empirical cases from Indonesian indigenous communities with international literature on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy, this study aims to construct a more integrated understanding of learning culture transformation as a negotiated, community-anchored process. The findings are intended to inform the design of inclusive education policy and teacher preparation programs that engage indigenous communities as active co-authors of educational change rather than passive recipients of a standardized curriculum.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design combining systematic document study with thematic literature synthesis, an approach appropriate for examining a socio-cultural phenomenon that has already been documented across multiple independent empirical studies rather than requiring new primary fieldwork. The unit of analysis was the documented learning-culture transformation process of indigenous (*adat*) communities engaging with formal or non-formal inclusive education programs, with primary attention to the Baduy community of Kanekes, Banten, and indigenous communities in Papua, contextualized against international literature on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2008 and 2025, sourced from nationally accredited (Sinta-indexed) Indonesian journals and internationally indexed (Scopus/Web of Science-adjacent) journals. Search terms combined Indonesian and English keywords, including "*transformasi budaya belajar*," "*masyarakat adat*," "*pendidikan inklusif*," "culturally responsive pedagogy,"

and "Indigenous education sovereignty." Articles were included if they (a) reported empirical or conceptual findings on the intersection of indigenous or *adat* communities with formal, non-formal, or inclusive education, (b) were published in an accredited or internationally indexed journal, and (c) provided sufficient methodological or contextual detail to support thematic comparison. Articles were excluded if they addressed disability-focused inclusive education without any *adat* or indigenous community dimension, unless they contributed conceptual grounding for the broader inclusive education framework used in the discussion.

Data analysis followed the ethnographic content-analysis logic originally applied by Sutoto (2017) in studying the Baduy learning culture, comprising four sequential stages adapted from Spradley's technique: domain analysis, to identify broad cultural categories relevant to learning and schooling; taxonomic analysis, to organize sub-categories within each domain (for example, forms of concealment, sites of learning, and roles of community gatekeepers); componential analysis, to compare contrasting attributes across cases (for example, prohibition-based versus accommodation-based community responses); and cultural-theme analysis, to identify overarching patterns that connect findings across the Indonesian and international literature. Coding was performed manually across the collected articles, with recurring concepts clustered into themes through constant comparison. To strengthen credibility, source triangulation was applied by cross-checking claims about the Baduy case across at least three independent sources (Sutoto, 2017; Sutisna et al., 2023; Mustomi, 2017) and by comparing Indonesian findings against international culturally responsive pedagogy literature to assess whether patterns identified locally were consistent with, or divergent from, patterns reported elsewhere. Dependability was supported by maintaining a transparent audit trail of source selection and by restricting thematic claims to those directly supported by cited evidence.

The synthesis was organized around three explanatory lenses drawn from the reviewed literature: (1) negotiation theory of cultural change, which frames learning-culture transformation as an outcome of ongoing bargaining between adat authority and external educational demands rather than a one-directional imposition; (2) culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which

evaluates the extent to which educational programs actively incorporate and sustain community knowledge systems rather than merely accommodating them (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McCarty & Lee, 2014); and (3) sustainability of educational transformation, which considers the institutional and relational conditions such as trust, mediating actors, and continuity of local ownership that determine whether a given transformation persists over time. These three lenses structure the presentation of findings in the following section.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of documented cases produced two central findings that directly address the study's research questions, discussed below as focused discussion points, followed by a brief account of the conditions that determine whether transformation is sustained.

Negotiated Transformation: From Prohibition to Selective Accommodation

The first and most salient finding is that learning-culture transformation among indigenous communities rarely proceeds through outright rejection or wholesale adoption of formal education; instead, it unfolds through a negotiated, incremental process in which *adat* authority retains formal control over the terms of engagement while allowing substantive change to occur beneath the surface. This pattern is most clearly documented in the Baduy case. Sutoto (2017) found that although the *adat* prohibition against formal schooling (*larangan sekolah*) was never rescinded, transformational community leaders introduced a de facto system of learning-culture control consisting of closed-management admission of learners, concealed or disguised attendance at schools outside customary territory, and the deliberate concentration of educational activity at the border of *ulayat* (customary) land rather than within it. This arrangement allowed individual motivation to learn to be optimized while preserving the symbolic and legal integrity of the prohibition itself, illustrating that the *adat* rule functioned less as an absolute barrier and more as a boundary condition within which change could still occur.

This negotiated pattern is corroborated by independent studies of Baduy customary institutions. Sutisna et al. (2023) demonstrated that *pikukuh adat* (customary law) continues to operate as an effective mechanism of social control even as community members increasingly interact with modern institutions, indicating that customary authority adapts rather than collapses under external pressure. Sujana (2020) similarly showed that oral literacy traditions embedded in *pikukuh* serve as a living historical and religious archive that continues to shape how knowledge is transmitted, suggesting that any inclusive education program introduced into such a community must contend with, rather than

bypass, existing knowledge-transmission structures. Mustomi (2017) extended this argument by tracing broader transformation in Baduy legal cultural order under modernization, concluding that customary structures selectively absorb external influence in ways that reinforce, rather than erode, *adat* legitimacy when the community itself controls the pace and terms of change.

A comparable negotiation dynamic is evident outside Java. Qomarrullah et al. (2024) examined the role of *adat* communities in developing education based on the social environment in Papua and found that educational development initiatives gained traction precisely when they were framed as extensions of existing community social structures rather than as externally imposed programs. This is consistent with the international literature on Indigenous education sovereignty: McCarty and Lee (2014) argue that sustainable transformation requires communities to retain authority over educational goals and content, while Castagno and Brayboy (2008) caution that schooling arrangements which fail to actively counter assimilationist pressure tend to produce disengagement rather than genuine inclusion. Read together, the Indonesian and international evidence converges on a single explanatory principle: learning-culture transformation among indigenous communities is sustainable to the extent that it is negotiated on terms the community itself sets and can revise, rather than terms dictated externally by the state education system.

This finding directly answers the first research question. The shift in learning culture observed across these cases is not a linear replacement of *adat* learning with formal schooling, but a layered accommodation in which formal educational content is admitted into community life through channels concealment, boundary-siting, selective participation that keep *adat* authority structurally intact. Programs that ignore this layered structure, treating inclusion as simple physical access to schools, are therefore likely to be perceived as threats to *adat* legitimacy and to trigger resistance rather than transformation.

Community-Based, Culturally Responsive Strategies as the Engine of Sustainable Inclusion

The second central finding concerns the specific strategies that enable negotiated transformation to be sustained rather than remaining a fragile, ad hoc arrangement. Across the reviewed literature, three recurring strategic elements emerge: embedding local wisdom directly into curricular content, positioning *adat* leaders and community elders as co-designers rather than mere gatekeepers of educational programs, and building continuous, low-friction points of contact between formal educational actors and the community.

Internationally, Ava and Page (2020) showed that the tivaevae model in the Cook Islands a culturally responsive pedagogy built around a collaborative textile-making practice succeeded in delivering sustainable, quality education precisely because it treated cultural practice as pedagogical content rather than as a decorative addition to an otherwise standard curriculum. Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) reached a parallel conclusion in the very

different context of Canadian higher education, finding that indigenizing curriculum reshaped classroom relationships and knowledge validation practices, not merely reading lists. In Indonesia, Salmia et al. (2024) provided quantitative evidence that teaching modules based on local wisdom within the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum framework significantly improved measured learning outcomes, indicating that culturally grounded content is not merely symbolically appropriate but instrumentally effective for achieving conventional educational goals. Riley and Meston (2025) add a further dimension, showing that Indigenous educational scholars in Australia regard genuine inclusion as requiring teachers to develop critical reflexivity and cultural knowledge, rather than treating cultural responsiveness as a checklist of classroom activities.

The second strategic element community co-design is illustrated by the alternative, non-formal educational arrangements documented in Indonesia. Mustolih (2019) described the *rumah inklusif* (inclusive house) model in Kembaran Village, Kebumen, in which children with disabilities and children without special needs learn together in a traditional joglo house near their homes, with curricular content shaped through a "liberation" approach that grants learners freedom to help determine their own educational menu; this model emerged directly from community initiative rather than top-down policy design. Maghfiroh (2018) similarly found that the successful introduction of inclusive education coursework into teacher-training programs depended on aligning course content with locally salient religious and social values rather than importing a generic inclusion curriculum wholesale. Both cases indicate that when community actors participate in shaping how inclusion is operationalized, the resulting programs are more readily absorbed into local learning culture.

The third strategic element concerns the sustainability infrastructure surrounding these programs. Fitriandari and Winata (2021) argue that education management for sustainable development in Indonesia requires deliberate institutional planning that connects local program design to national sustainability targets, rather than treating sustainability as an automatic outcome of program launch. Rokhman et al. (2024) demonstrate that sustained teacher professional development is a critical, and frequently underfunded, component of building an educational ecosystem capable of achieving Sustainable Development Goal targets, since teachers are the primary intermediaries who translate culturally responsive design into daily classroom practice. Qomarrullah et al. (2022) further show, in the context of leadership management training for community-based programs, that sustained community trust is built incrementally through recurring, low-stakes engagement rather than through a single large-scale intervention. Taken together, these findings answer the second research question: sustainable transformation of indigenous learning culture depends on a triad of curricular localization, community co-design, and institutional continuity, each reinforcing the others over time.

Trust, Mediation, and the Conditions for Sustained Transformation

A further pattern relevant to sustainability concerns the role of trust and mediation between *adat* institutions and external educational actors. Puryanto and Sardjiyo (2023) found that Baduy conflict-resolution practices rely heavily on traditional, consensus-based mechanisms that prioritize the preservation of social harmony over the assertion of individual claims; this same orientation toward negotiated harmony appears to extend to how the community manages its relationship with external institutions, including schools. Programs that respect this preference for gradual, harmony-preserving negotiation rather than demanding rapid or visible change are more likely to be tolerated and, over time, internalized. Suryani (2014) offers a complementary insight from media studies, showing that external representations of Baduy local wisdom, when produced without adequate community involvement, can distort public understanding of the community's values and complicate trust-building with outside institutions; this underscores the importance of accurate, community-validated communication as part of any sustainable inclusion strategy.

These trust-related findings suggest that intercultural facilitators individuals or organizations capable of communicating credibly with both *adat* authorities and formal education actors play an indispensable mediating role. Where such facilitation is present, as in the boundary-sited learning arrangements described by Sutoto (2017) or the community-initiated *rumah inklusif* model described by Mustolih (2019), transformation tends to stabilize into an ongoing practice rather than remaining a one-off event. Where facilitation is absent or where educational programs are introduced without regard for existing customary authority structures, the reviewed literature suggests a higher risk of superficial compliance, covert resistance, or outright rejection. This has direct implications for policy: government and civil-society actors designing inclusive education programs for indigenous communities should invest as much in relationship-building infrastructure trusted local liaisons, iterative consultation, and flexible timelines as in curricular or infrastructural inputs.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that sustainable inclusive education for indigenous communities is best understood not as a delivery mechanism for a fixed curriculum, but as an evolving cultural negotiation in which formal educational content is progressively woven into existing structures of authority, meaning, and social control. This reframing has practical consequences for how success should be measured: rather than assessing inclusion solely through enrolment or attendance statistics, evaluators should attend to whether *adat* authority remains intact, whether community members perceive the program as self-directed rather than imposed, and whether local knowledge is visibly present within the curriculum rather than treated as background context.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how sustainable inclusive education programs transform the learning culture of indigenous communities and what community-based strategies enable this transformation while preserving *adat* identity. The synthesis of Indonesian and international literature shows that learning-culture transformation among indigenous communities occurs through negotiated, incremental accommodation rather than direct replacement of customary learning systems, as most clearly illustrated by the Baduy community's boundary-sited, concealment-based engagement with formal schooling. It further shows that this transformation is sustained when three conditions are present together: curricular content that localizes rather than displaces indigenous knowledge, active co-design by *adat* leaders and community elders, and continuous institutional support including teacher professional development and trust-building mediation that allows the program to persist beyond its initial introduction. These findings carry practical implications for policymakers, teacher educators, and non-governmental actors: inclusive education initiatives directed at indigenous communities should be designed as long-term, community-anchored processes rather than standardized interventions, with success measured by the degree of local ownership and cultural continuity as much as by conventional enrolment or achievement metrics. Future research employing direct field-based ethnographic methods across a wider range of Indonesian indigenous communities would help to test the generalizability of the negotiation and co-design mechanisms identified here, and to clarify how these mechanisms interact with differing forms of *adat* governance across regions.

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