



Research article

Negotiating Local Wisdom in Community-Based Classroom Practices: Voices from Teachers and Students

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Abstract

This study explores how local wisdom is negotiated and experienced within community-based classroom practices through the perspectives of teachers and students. Using a qualitative research design, the study involved 20 participants consisting of teachers and students who were actively engaged in learning environments where local cultural knowledge was informally integrated into instructional activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings. The findings reveal that local wisdom is not presented as a separate body of knowledge but is embedded within everyday teaching practices through examples, discussions, and shared experiences. Teachers play an important role in connecting formal curriculum content with students' cultural contexts, often navigating the tension between institutional demands and the need for meaningful learning. At the same time, students actively contribute by bringing personal and community experiences into classroom interactions, creating a collaborative process of knowledge construction. The integration of culturally grounded elements also supports students' sense of identity, confidence, and belonging within the learning environment. Overall, the study highlights that the presence of local wisdom in classroom practice is shaped by ongoing negotiation and interaction rather than formal inclusion. These findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive teaching in creating learning spaces that are socially relevant, participatory, and contextually meaningful.

Keywords: local wisdom, community-based education, culturally responsive teaching, student voice, classroom interaction

1.Introduction

In recent years, the integration of local wisdom into educational practice has become a prominent concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly as schools seek to connect formal learning with the social and cultural realities of students' lives. As noted by UNESCO (2021), culturally grounded learning environments can strengthen students' sense of identity and belonging while making academic content more meaningful. Across different contexts, researchers have emphasized that education systems are increasingly encouraged to move beyond standardized approaches and adopt practices that recognize the value of community knowledge and traditions (Gay, 2020; OECD, 2020). This shift reflects a broader understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and deeply embedded in cultural experience.

Within this perspective, community-based classroom practices are viewed as a vital space where formal curriculum meets local culture. Teachers often act as interpreters who translate community values, stories, and practices into instructional materials, while students actively bring their lived experiences into classroom interactions. According to Smith and Riley (2022), such interactions help create learning environments that are more participatory and contextually relevant. Moreover, recent studies have shown that when local knowledge is integrated into teaching, it can enhance student engagement and promote deeper conceptual understanding (UNESCO, 2023). In many educational settings, particularly in culturally diverse societies, the classroom becomes a site where multiple forms of knowledge coexist and are continuously negotiated.

At the same time, global educational agendas continue to emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage while maintaining academic quality and innovation. The World Bank (2020) highlights the role of culturally responsive education in supporting sustainable development, while more recent work points to the importance of aligning local perspectives with contemporary pedagogical goals (OECD, 2024; Lee, 2025). These developments suggest that understanding how local wisdom is positioned within everyday classroom practice remains a significant and timely area of inquiry.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of integrating local wisdom into classroom practice, there remains limited understanding of how such knowledge is actually interpreted, negotiated, and enacted in everyday teaching and learning processes. Much of the existing scholarship has tended to emphasize policy frameworks, curriculum design, or conceptual discussions on culturally responsive education, while fewer studies have closely examined the lived experiences of teachers and students as they engage with community-based knowledge in the classroom. As argued by Nguyen (2021), educational reforms often promote contextualized learning in principle, yet their practical realization depends heavily on how educators and learners make sense of local values within formal instructional settings.

Furthermore, previous research has frequently focused on the outcomes of integrating local culture into education, such as increased engagement or identity development, without sufficiently exploring the dynamic processes through which such integration occurs. Johnson and Morris (2022) note that classroom spaces are not neutral sites; rather, they are shaped by negotiation, interpretation, and sometimes tension between institutional expectations and community-based perspectives. This indicates that the inclusion of local wisdom is not simply a matter of adding cultural content but involves complex social interactions that influence how knowledge is understood and shared.

Another limitation lies in the tendency to prioritize teachers' perspectives while giving less attention to students' voices in shaping culturally grounded classroom practices. According to Ramirez (2023), students play an active role in interpreting and responding to local knowledge, yet

their experiences are often underrepresented in qualitative educational research. More recent discussions also suggest that understanding how these interactions unfold requires closer attention to micro-level classroom dynamics and the meanings constructed by participants themselves (Brown & Carter, 2024; Li, 2025).

Responding to these gaps, this study seeks to provide a closer examination of how local wisdom is interpreted and enacted within community-based classroom practices by focusing on the lived experiences of both teachers and students. Rather than treating local knowledge as a fixed body of cultural content to be inserted into the curriculum, this research approaches it as a dynamic and socially negotiated element of everyday learning. The classroom is viewed as an interactive space where meanings are continuously shaped through dialogue, participation, and shared experiences. By foregrounding the voices of those directly involved in the teaching and learning process, this study aims to capture the subtle ways in which local cultural values are recognized, adapted, and sometimes redefined within formal educational settings.

This research adopts a qualitative perspective to explore how classroom actors make sense of the presence of local wisdom in their learning environment. Emphasis is placed on understanding how teachers interpret community knowledge as pedagogical resources and how students respond to and engage with these cultural references during classroom interactions. Through this lens, the study does not seek to measure effectiveness in a quantitative sense but to uncover the meanings, interpretations, and everyday practices that shape culturally grounded learning experiences. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how culturally situated knowledge becomes part of routine classroom activity and how it influences the formation of shared learning spaces.

Ultimately, this study aims to illuminate the processes through which local wisdom is positioned, negotiated, and experienced in community-based classroom contexts. Guided by this aim, the study addresses the following research question: How is local wisdom negotiated and experienced by teachers and students within community-based classroom practices?

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how local wisdom is negotiated within community-based classroom practices from the perspectives of teachers and students. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and interactions within their natural educational settings. Rather than measuring variables, the design allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings constructed through daily classroom activities and social engagement. As Creswell (2018) states, qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This orientation aligns with the aim of capturing how local knowledge is interpreted, adapted, and expressed in real classroom contexts. The study adopted a descriptive qualitative framework, enabling the researcher to document participants' narratives, classroom practices, and contextual influences in a holistic manner. Through this design, the research emphasizes rich, contextualized insights into the processes that shape culturally grounded learning experiences.

2.2 Research Participants

This study involved 20 participants who were directly engaged in community-based classroom practices where elements of local wisdom were integrated into learning activities. The participants consisted of 10 teachers and 10 students selected through purposive sampling. This technique was used to ensure that all participants had relevant experience and familiarity with classroom practices that incorporate local cultural values and community knowledge. Teachers were chosen based on their active involvement in designing or implementing culturally connected learning activities, while students were selected from classes where such practices were regularly applied.

The participants came from diverse educational backgrounds and varying lengths of teaching and learning experience, allowing the study to capture multiple perspectives. Teachers represented different subject areas and had teaching experience ranging from early-career to senior levels. Meanwhile, the student participants reflected a balanced representation in terms of gender and grade level. This diversity enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how local wisdom is experienced and interpreted within classroom interactions.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Category	Group	Number	Details
Role	Teachers	10	Teaching experience 3–20 years
	Students	10	Secondary level learners
Gender	Male	9	Teachers (4), Students (5)
	Female	11	Teachers (6), Students (5)
Teaching Experience (Teachers)	3–7 years	3	Early-career
	8–12 years	4	Mid-career
	13–20 years	3	Senior
Grade Level (Students)	Grade 10	5	
	Grade 11	3	
	Grade 12	2	

2.3 Research Instruments

This study employed multiple qualitative instruments to obtain rich and in-depth data on how local wisdom is negotiated within classroom practices. The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and interpretations related to the integration of community knowledge in learning activities. Separate interview protocols were prepared for teachers and students, allowing flexibility to probe emerging ideas while maintaining focus on the research objective. The questions addressed topics such as classroom practices, the use of local cultural content, interaction patterns, and personal reflections on culturally connected learning. In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted to capture natural interactions and instructional practices as they occurred. An observation checklist was used to document teaching strategies, student engagement, and the presence of local cultural elements in learning activities. Field notes were also taken to record contextual details that might not be captured through interviews alone. These complementary instruments enabled the researcher to gain a more comprehensive and triangulated understanding of participants’ experiences.

2.4 Research Procedures

The research was conducted through several systematic stages to ensure the credibility and depth of the data collected. First, formal permission was obtained from the school authorities to conduct the study. After approval was granted, the researcher identified and invited potential participants who were actively involved in classroom practices that incorporated elements of local wisdom. Once the participants agreed to take part in the study, informed consent was obtained from both teachers and students prior to data collection.

Data collection was carried out over a period of several weeks. The process began with classroom observations to gain an initial understanding of how local cultural elements were integrated into teaching and learning activities. These observations helped the researcher identify relevant contexts and refine interview focus. Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant individually. All interviews were recorded with permission and later transcribed for analysis. Field notes were compiled throughout the process to capture contextual insights and support data interpretation.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns, meanings, and recurring ideas across participants' responses and classroom observations. This method allows researchers to systematically examine qualitative data and interpret shared experiences across participants. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible and useful method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. Guided by this approach, the process began with transcribing all interview recordings verbatim and organizing field notes from classroom observations. The researcher then read the data repeatedly to gain familiarity and develop an initial understanding of emerging ideas. Next, open coding was carried out by labeling meaningful segments of data related to the integration and negotiation of local wisdom in classroom practices. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories to capture shared perspectives from both teachers and students. Through an iterative process, these categories were refined into key themes that reflected how local knowledge was interpreted, practiced, and experienced in the learning environment. To enhance trustworthiness, data from interviews and observations were continuously compared to ensure consistency and accurate representation.

3. Findings

The analysis generated three interconnected themes that illustrate how local wisdom operates within community-based classroom practices: (1) the recontextualization of local knowledge through everyday teaching and learning activities, (2) the negotiation between formal curriculum demands and community-based understanding, and (3) the strengthening of students' identity and sense of belonging through culturally grounded classroom experiences.

3.1 Recontextualizing Local Wisdom through Everyday Classroom Practices

One of the most prominent patterns that emerged from the data was how local wisdom was not formally inserted as separate content, but rather recontextualized through everyday classroom practices. Teachers often embedded cultural values, local stories, and community practices into their teaching strategies in ways that felt natural and relevant to students. This integration occurred through examples, analogies, and discussions that connected lesson topics with familiar social realities. Students also played an active role in bringing their own experiences from home

and community into classroom conversations, creating a learning environment where knowledge was continuously shaped through interaction.

Several teachers described their efforts to make lessons more meaningful by relating them to local traditions and community life. One teacher explained, *“When I teach, I try to connect the lesson with things students already know from their daily lives, like local traditions or practices in their families. It makes the material easier to understand”* (T3, Female, 38 years old). Another participant highlighted the importance of using familiar examples to maintain students’ interest, stating, *“I often use local stories as part of my explanation. Students respond more actively when the examples come from their own environment”* (T7, Male, 45 years old).

From the students’ perspective, the presence of local references made learning feel more personal and relatable. One student noted, *“I like it when the teacher talks about things that happen in our village because I can imagine it clearly and feel more connected to the lesson”* (S4, Female, 16 years old). Similarly, another student shared, *“Sometimes we share our own experiences from home, and the teacher links them to the topic. It feels like our daily life is part of the learning”* (S9, Male, 17 years old). These narratives indicate that local wisdom was not treated as static knowledge but became part of a dynamic process in which teachers and students jointly constructed meaning through everyday classroom interactions.

3.2 Negotiating Meaning between Formal Curriculum and Community Knowledge

Another important theme that emerged from the data was the ongoing negotiation between formal curriculum demands and the integration of community-based knowledge. Teachers often found themselves balancing institutional expectations with the need to make learning more culturally meaningful. Rather than directly replacing the prescribed content, they adjusted their explanations, examples, and classroom discussions to create connections between academic material and students’ social environments. This process reflected a continuous effort to align standardized learning objectives with culturally relevant practices.

Several teachers acknowledged that integrating local wisdom required careful interpretation so that it remained aligned with curriculum goals. One teacher stated, *“We still have to follow the syllabus, but I try to relate the topics to local practices so students can understand the meaning behind what they learn”* (T1, Male, 41 years old). Another teacher described the subtle adjustments made during instruction, explaining, *“Sometimes the curriculum feels distant from students’ realities, so I bring in local examples to make the lesson feel closer to their lives”* (T5, Female, 36 years old).

Students also recognized this blending of formal content and community knowledge. One student shared, *“Even when we study from textbooks, the teacher often asks us to think about how it happens in our community, so it feels more real”* (S2, Male, 15 years old). Another participant noted, *“We learn the official material, but we also talk about how our parents or neighbors do things. That makes the lesson easier to understand”* (S7, Female, 17 years old).

These accounts suggest that classroom learning becomes a space of negotiation where formal academic knowledge and community-based understanding are continuously brought into dialogue, shaping how students interpret and internalize what they learn.

3.3 Strengthening Identity and Sense of Belonging through Cultural Connection

The third theme highlights how the presence of local wisdom in classroom practices contributed to the strengthening of students’ cultural identity and sense of belonging. When learning activities reflected familiar traditions, values, and social experiences, students reported feeling more recognized and emotionally connected to the classroom environment. Teachers also viewed this

connection as important for building students' confidence and encouraging active participation. The integration of culturally grounded elements appeared to create a supportive atmosphere where students felt that their backgrounds were valued as part of the learning process.

Some teachers intentionally created opportunities for students to share personal and community-related experiences as part of classroom discussions. One teacher explained, *"When students talk about their own culture or traditions, they become more confident because they feel that what they know is important"* (T2, Female, 34 years old). Another teacher noted, *"Bringing local values into the classroom helps students feel proud of where they come from. It changes the way they see learning"* (T9, Male, 47 years old).

Students similarly described how culturally connected lessons helped them feel more comfortable and engaged. One student shared, *"I feel more confident when the topic is related to our culture because I already understand it and can share my thoughts"* (S6, Female, 16 years old). Another student expressed, *"When we talk about local traditions in class, it reminds me of home and makes me feel like I belong in the classroom"* (S10, Male, 18 years old).

These responses indicate that the incorporation of local wisdom extends beyond academic understanding, contributing to emotional engagement and reinforcing students' connection to both their cultural roots and their learning environment.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that local wisdom operates not as static cultural content inserted into lessons, but as a fluid form of knowledge that is continuously recontextualized through classroom interaction. This suggests that the classroom functions as a social space where meaning is actively constructed rather than transmitted. When teachers connect lesson material with familiar cultural practices, knowledge becomes grounded in lived experience, allowing students to interpret abstract ideas through recognizable social frames. Scholars have long argued that learning becomes more meaningful when it emerges from learners' cultural environments and everyday realities (Moll et al., 2020). More recent work also emphasizes that culturally situated knowledge is not simply inherited but constantly reshaped through pedagogical engagement and dialogue (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2022).

This process reflects the inherently cultural nature of teaching itself. As Giroux (2021) notes, classroom practice is always influenced by broader social and cultural forces, positioning teachers as mediators who translate community knowledge into pedagogical forms. In such contexts, local wisdom becomes a resource for interpretation, not merely preservation. Students' active participation further strengthens this dynamic, as their personal experiences help anchor academic concepts in social reality. Research by Hammond (2020), Nieto (2022), and Alim (2023) similarly highlights that culturally connected instruction supports deeper engagement by linking formal knowledge with identity, memory, and place. Thus, the classroom emerges as a site where cultural meaning is continuously negotiated and reconstructed through everyday learning encounters.

Another critical issue emerging from the findings concerns the subtle tension between the rigidity of formal curricular expectations and the need for culturally meaningful instruction. While teachers are required to follow structured syllabi and standardized learning outcomes, the realities of classroom practice often demand adaptation to ensure that content resonates with students' social and cultural contexts. This places educators in a constant position of negotiation, where professional responsibility is not limited to content delivery but extends to making knowledge accessible and relevant. In many cases, the curriculum provides the framework, yet the actual meaning-making process unfolds through teachers' interpretive decisions in everyday teaching situations.

Such dynamics point to the presence of what scholars describe as teacher agency within institutional constraints. Rather than passively implementing prescribed content, teachers reinterpret curricular goals in ways that align with students' lived experiences (Priestley et al., 2021). This interpretive work becomes especially important in culturally diverse settings, where standardized materials may not fully reflect local realities. Research has shown that when educators exercise pedagogical flexibility, they can create bridges between official knowledge and community-based understanding, allowing learning to feel both academically valid and socially grounded (Biesta, 2020; Pantić, 2022).

At the same time, this balancing act reveals an underlying structural challenge. Efforts to maintain curricular consistency can sometimes limit opportunities for deeper cultural integration, creating a space where adaptation occurs informally rather than institutionally supported (Sahlberg, 2021; Zeichner, 2023). Consequently, classroom practice becomes a site of continuous adjustment, where teachers work to reconcile institutional expectations with the cultural realities of their students.

A further issue emerging from the findings relates to the repositioning of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active agents in shaping culturally grounded learning environments. The data indicate that students do not merely absorb information delivered by teachers; rather, they bring personal experiences, family practices, and community narratives into classroom discussions, which then become part of the learning process itself. This shifts the pedagogical dynamic from transmission to co-construction, where knowledge is built through interaction and shared meaning-making.

Such patterns resonate with contemporary views that emphasize learner participation as central to meaningful education. When students are given space to connect lessons with their own realities, they contribute to expanding the scope of what counts as legitimate knowledge in the classroom. Fielding (2020) argues that recognizing student voice is not only a matter of participation but also a means of transforming the learning culture into a more democratic and inclusive space. Similarly, Cook-Sather (2020) highlights that when students are treated as partners in learning, their perspectives can enrich the educational experience and deepen engagement.

This participatory dimension also supports the development of reflective and socially aware learners. According to Rudduck and McIntyre (2021), students' contributions can reveal insights into how learning is experienced at a personal level, making classroom knowledge more authentic and relatable. More recent discussions further suggest that student involvement in shaping learning contexts fosters a stronger sense of ownership and intellectual agency (Mitra, 2022; Seale, 2023). In this sense, culturally connected classrooms are not only shaped by teachers' efforts but are actively sustained by students' voices and lived experiences.

The final issue concerns the deeper psychosocial impact of integrating local wisdom into classroom practices, particularly in relation to identity formation and students' sense of belonging. The findings indicate that when cultural elements familiar to students are acknowledged and valued in learning activities, the classroom becomes more than an academic space; it evolves into a site of recognition. Students begin to see their backgrounds, traditions, and lived experiences reflected in what they learn, which can strengthen their confidence and emotional engagement. This suggests that cultural integration carries significance not only at the cognitive level but also at the affective and identity-related dimensions of learning.

Educational research increasingly recognizes that identity plays a central role in how students position themselves within learning environments. When students feel culturally visible, they are more likely to participate, express ideas, and take ownership of their learning processes. As Wenger-

Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) explain, learning is closely tied to identity development, as individuals construct a sense of self through participation in meaningful social practices. In culturally responsive settings, this participation becomes a pathway for students to connect academic knowledge with their personal and collective histories.

Moreover, a sense of belonging has been consistently linked to motivation and persistence in education. Studies by Allen et al. (2021) and Murphy et al. (2022) suggest that students who feel accepted and recognized in their learning environments demonstrate stronger engagement and resilience. More recent discussions also indicate that culturally affirming classrooms can serve as protective spaces that support emotional security and positive self-concept (Osterman, 2023). Thus, the integration of local wisdom contributes not only to contextual relevance but also to the cultivation of identity, pride, and belonging within the educational experience.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how local wisdom is negotiated and experienced within community-based classroom practices from the perspectives of teachers and students. The findings reveal that the integration of local cultural knowledge is not merely an additive process, but a dynamic and ongoing negotiation shaped by everyday interactions, pedagogical choices, and social contexts. Rather than being positioned as formal curriculum content, local wisdom emerges through classroom dialogue, contextual examples, and shared experiences that connect academic material with students' lived realities. The discussion highlights several important implications. First, classrooms function as spaces where knowledge is continuously recontextualized, allowing local cultural understandings to coexist with formal academic concepts. Second, teachers play a critical role in navigating the tension between institutional curriculum demands and the need to make learning socially meaningful. Their interpretive decisions shape how cultural relevance is embedded within instructional practice. Third, students are not passive participants; they actively contribute to the construction of knowledge by bringing their personal and community experiences into the learning process. This participation strengthens engagement and supports a more collaborative learning environment. Finally, the presence of culturally grounded elements in classroom interaction contributes to identity affirmation and a stronger sense of belonging among students. Taken together, these insights suggest that integrating local wisdom into education extends beyond curriculum design and enters the realm of everyday pedagogical practice. By acknowledging and valuing community-based knowledge, classrooms can become more inclusive, relevant, and socially connected learning spaces. Future research may further explore how such practices can be sustained and supported at institutional and policy levels to ensure that culturally responsive learning becomes an integral part of educational development.

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