

# The Integration of Local Wisdom with Learning Innovations in the ‘Buddhism’ Course for Lower Secondary School Students in Thailand’s Educational Opportunity Expansion Schools

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate the local wisdom within communities served by educational opportunity expansion schools in Thailand. Specifically, it seeks to identify local wisdom that can be integrated into the ‘Buddhism’ course for lower secondary school students. The study also synthesizes the integration of this local wisdom with learning management and develops an innovative learning model named ‘SAAOL’. Additionally, student satisfaction with this learning approach is evaluated. The study involved religious leaders, local philosophers, community leaders, educational administrators, teachers, and 200 students selected through purposive sampling. Research tools included in-depth interviews, a learning management manual, and a satisfaction assessment form. The results reveal four local wisdoms, namely ‘Sim’, ‘Khalum’, ‘Pha-Wed Cloth’, and ‘Khun Mak Beng,’ which can be integrated into the ‘Buddhism’ course through the ‘SAAOL learning model.’ Student satisfaction with this approach was notably high.

**Keywords:** local wisdom, Buddhism, learning model, learning innovation

## 1. Introduction

The teaching and learning management of the Thai education system in the past have failed in the learning management process to cultivate the desired characteristics of the learners (Thongdee et al., 2022; Darling-Hammond, 2017). In other words, it cannot compel individuals to develop basic thinking skills and grasp the approaches to managing lifestyle competencies (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Over the past five years, the Ministry of Education of Thailand has undertaken a learning reform program aimed at improving student quality (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). This initiative has led to significant improvements in teaching and learning processes, fostering pedagogical practices that encourage students to think critically, engage in research, and seek knowledge from a variety of learning sources, including local wisdom (Education Council Secretariat, 2017; Hattie, 2008).

The integration of local wisdom is not a novel concept on the global stage (Marzano, 2007). It has been successfully implemented in various educational contexts worldwide. For instance, local wisdom has been integrated into Arabic learning (Aflisia, 2019), foreign language teaching for Indonesian students (Albantani, 2018), Indonesian literary teaching materials (Muhammad Fuad, Anwar, & Ulul, 2020), and social science lessons (Komara & Meliyani, 2021). Similarly, in Thailand, the utilization of local wisdom and the involvement of local philosophers in the learning management process has been explicitly emphasized in the National Education Plan 2017–2036 (UNESCO, 2015; Education Council Secretariat, 2017; Chumsukon & Ruangsak, 2021).

As educational management in Thailand adapts to these changes, there is a growing recognition of the need for greater participation from all sectors to improve the quality of education (Vitthaya Thongdee, Sukumal, et al., 2021; Thongdee et al., 2022). The traditional approach to learning management in subjects such as social studies, religion, and culture, guided by the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008, has not always effectively connected with local learning sources and wisdom (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This disconnect can hinder the development of practical skills and the application of knowledge in real-life contexts (Auiwong, Panthachai, Saenpuran, Wongpornpavan, & Ruangsak, 2021). While Buddhist learning management generally adheres to the core curriculum, it often falls short in terms of integrating local resources and wisdom, which could enrich the learning experience (Bandura, 1997). In some cases, teachers who impart Buddhist teachings may lack the necessary skills

and experience to effectively incorporate local resources into the learning process (Dweck, 2006). This can result in students losing interest in Buddhism and overlooking its value and importance in Thai society (Prensky).

Buddhist learning management should shift its focus toward creating curricula that align with local contexts and resources, enabling students to directly engage with local experiences and wisdom (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This approach not only encourages students to think independently and practice critical analysis but also instills in them a deep appreciation for local resources, wisdom, and community values (Vitthaya Thongdee, Promkun, Sawatta, Namseethan, & Ruangsarn, 2021).

Embracing learning from local contexts aligns with the National Education Act of 1999, which emphasizes the importance of providing suitable learning resources and utilizing existing resources within educational institutions and communities (Boonchu, 2005). The surveyed educational opportunity expansion schools in Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand, are surrounded by a wealth of local wisdom (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). However, these invaluable resources are often underutilized in educational management to enhance educational quality (UNESCO, 2015). As a result, this research explores the integration of local wisdom into the creation of innovative learning experiences within the 'Buddhism' course for lower secondary school students (Hattie, 2008).

This comprehensive approach aims to bridge the gap between traditional Buddhist learning management and the wealth of local wisdom and resources available. Ultimately, it seeks to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become active and responsible members of their communities (Marzano, 2007). This research has its aims to: (1) Identify Local Wisdoms: To explore and identify the local wisdom within the communities of educational opportunity expansion schools under the Office of Ubon Ratchathani Secondary Educational Service Area 3, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand, that can be effectively incorporated into the curriculum of the course 'Buddhism' for lower secondary school students. (2) Integration of Local Wisdom: To synthesize and integrate the identified local wisdom into the learning management of the course 'Buddhism,' creating a cohesive and culturally enriched educational experience. (3) Development of Learning Management Innovation: To develop an innovative learning management model that seamlessly incorporates the local wisdom discovered, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the educational process. (4) Evaluation of Student Satisfaction: To assess and analyze student satisfaction with the implemented learning management model, gauging its impact on their educational experience and overall satisfaction with the course 'Buddhism'. These objectives will guide the research in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the integration of local wisdom into the educational context and its influence on student satisfaction and learning outcomes.

## 2. Method

This research follows a Research and Development (R&D) methodology consisting of four distinct operational phases:

### 2.1 Study and Review

Step 1: Initiated with a comprehensive study and review of backgrounds related to local wisdom in Ubon Ratchathani Province, the integration of local wisdom into the course 'Buddhism,' and the learning management in the fields of Social Studies, Religion, and Culture. This phase involved an extensive review of documents and related research. Initially, the research process involved studying concepts, theories, principles, and existing research relevant to the project. This helped in identifying necessary information, potential sources, and key stakeholders. A preliminary interview form and an Item-Objective Congruences Index verification form were developed and sent to five experts in Research Methodology, Social Studies, Arts and Humanities, and Education, for verification of IOC. The interview form with 0.98 IOC was subsequently refined based on their feedback.

Step 2: This step entailed conducting interviews with ten key informants or stakeholders, comprising five religious leaders and five local philosophers. These interviews aimed to explore the local wisdom within the communities of the educational opportunity expansion schools under the Office of Ubon Ratchathani Secondary Educational Service Area 3, using Boyce's data collection method. Interview data were transcribed, reviewed, and compiled into a report. The report was shared with the interviewees, stakeholders, and communities for feedback. The final revised report was then disseminated to all relevant parties.

### 2.2 Synthesize

Step 1: Organized an academic seminar involving 20 stakeholders, including educational experts, teachers, community leaders, and educational administrators. The objective was to analyze the data collected during Phase 1 and select the local wisdom that should be integrated into the course 'Buddhism' for lower high school students in the educational opportunity expansion schools under the Office of Ubon Ratchathani Secondary Educational Service Area 3, Ubon Ratchathani Province.

Step 2: Involved integrating the selected local wisdom into the course ‘Buddhism’ by aligning it with the learning content based on the learning standards outlined in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 (Revised, 2017) of Thailand.

### 2.3 Design

This phase encompassed the organization of Focus Group Discussions with five educational experts specializing in social studies, learning management, curriculum and instruction, Buddhism, and philosophy. The objective was to collaboratively design and develop a learning management innovation to support the course. This innovation termed the ‘SAAOL learning process,’ stands for Self-Examination (S), Assemble (A), Analyze Surroundings (A), Open Mind and Experience (O), and Life for All (L) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

### 2.4 Implement and Evaluate

Conducted as an experimental research phase, this stage involved implementing the ‘SAAOL learning model’ with 200 students from four schools in the study area. Four teachers, one from each school, received a learning management manual verified by the above-mentioned experts and were tasked with teaching the selected local wisdom within the course ‘Buddhism’ to their respective students in the third year of lower secondary education. Following the completion of the learning management, students were asked to complete a satisfaction assessment form, and teachers were interviewed to gauge their satisfaction with the learning management results.

## 3. Results

The research results were as follows:

### 3.1 Selected Local Wisdoms

Through interviews with key informants and an academic seminar involving 20 stakeholders, four local wisdom was carefully chosen for integration into the course ‘Buddhism’ for lower secondary school students in the educational opportunity expansion schools under the Office of Ubon Ratchathani Secondary Educational Service Area 3, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand. These selected local wisdoms are as follows:

‘Sim’ (Uposatha, Buddhist Cathedral): Located at Si Khun Mueang Temple, Na Chan Village, Rawe Sub-district, Phibun Mangsahan District, Ubon Ratchathani Province, ‘Sim’ is a solid brick and mortar structure. Currently not in use, it requires maintenance. It includes features such as Cho Fa (gable apex) and Khun Thua (corbel). Inside the ‘Sim’, there is a principal Buddha image without any wall paintings (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Sim (Uposatha, Buddhist Cathedral)

'Khalum': 'Khalum' refers to prohibitions or community agreements that encourage ethical behavior. It encompasses morals and virtues rooted in Buddhism, especially 'Kala' in the Isan dialect. Some 'Khalum' are recorded in palm-leaf manuscripts preserved in the Uposatha of the village.

'Pha Wed Cloth': This cloth is woven and offered to the temple, featuring paintings related to the Vessantara Jataka, a story that reflects Buddhist ideals and teachings, emphasizing sacrifice and egolessness. It aligns to develop students' thinking skills (Figure 2).



Figure 2. 'Pha Wed Cloth'

'Khun Mak Beng': This handicraft uses readily available banana leaves to create layers, symbolizing Mount Meru, the dwelling place of Lord Shiva in Hinduism. It is believed to bring stability and welfare when used in the 'Su Kwan' ceremony. It contains savory sweet food, cotton, liquor, a rooster, and candles (Figure 3).



Figure 3. 'Khan Mak Beng'

### 3.2 Integration of Local Wisdoms into Learning Management

The integration of these local wisdoms into the course 'Buddhism' aligns with the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 (Revised, 2017) and the following learning standards: S 1.1: Know and understand the history, importance, religion, doctrines of Buddhism, or other respected religions and adhere to the principles for peaceful

coexistence. S 1.2: Understand, realize, and act as good believers, maintain Buddhism, or respected religions. For ‘Sim’ and ‘Khun Mak Beng,’ integration involves teaching students about the geography, history, practices, and Buddhist concepts related to these local wisdoms. For ‘Khalum’ and ‘Pha Wed Cloth,’ students learn about the history, importance, usage, and role of local philosophers and religious leaders associated with these wisdoms.

### 3.3 SAAOL Learning Model

Based on insights from a focus group discussion involving five educational experts, the ‘SAAOL learning model’ was developed to support the integration of the selected local wisdoms into the course ‘Buddhism.’ This model, consistent with self-knowledge and cultural ecology theories, comprises five stages of learning: Self-Examination (S): Students observe their life context, ask questions, and generate interest. Assemble (A): Students plan and search for answers from various learning resources. Analyze Surrounding (A): Students analyze information, contemplating it based on Buddhist ideas and local wisdom. Open Mind and Experience (O): Students share experiences and analytical results, fostering discussion. Life for all (L): Students apply their learning to solve problems, encouraging creativity and valuing diverse ways of life (Figure 4).

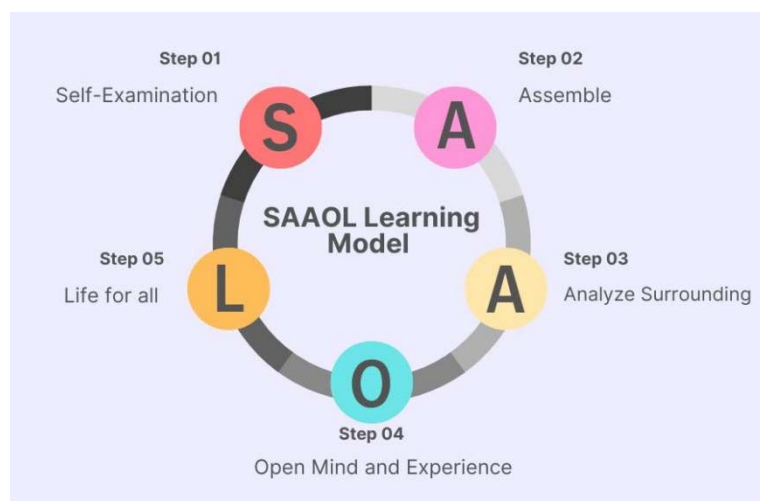


Figure 4. SAAOL Learning Model

### 3.4 Experimental Results

The ‘SAAOL learning model’ was experimentally implemented with 200 students from five schools in the study area. Each school had one teacher implement the model, teaching 40 students. Students were asked to provide feedback through a satisfaction assessment form. The teachers were also interviewed to gauge their satisfaction with the learning management. From the questionnaire using a 5-level estimation scale, the analysis was conducted to find the Mean using a 5-level evaluation criterion, as follows:

- 4.51–5.00 means very highly satisfied
- 3.51–4.50 means highly satisfied
- 2.51–3.50 means moderately satisfied
- 1.51–2.50 means slightly satisfied
- 1.00–1.50 means least satisfied

Finding the Standard Deviation (S.D.) involves interpreting the standard deviation value analyzed and analyzing it together with the mean. If the standard deviation is small, or close to 0 (zero), it means that the data has a small distribution. However, if the standard deviation is high, it indicates that the average score is widely distributed according to the standard deviation. The standard deviation values are defined as follows:

- 0.00–0.70 means a small distribution
- 0.71–1.00 means a moderate distribution
- More than 1.00 means a wide distribution

The results indicated that students expressed high satisfaction with the learning content, order, appropriateness,

and integration of local wisdoms (Table 2). Similarly, students showed satisfaction with the overall learning management, teacher support for student-centered learning, and the SAAOL learning model (Table 2).

Table 1. Students' basic information

Data	Number	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	90	45.00
Female	110	55.00
School:		
01	33	16.50
02	51	25.50
03	36	18.00
04	48	24.00
Total	200	100.00

Table 2. Students satisfaction

No	Questions	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
(1) Learning Content			
1.1	The learning content: 'Sim', 'Khalum', 'Pha Wed Cloth', and 'Khun Mak Beng' in this course is important and interesting.	4.45	.49
1.2	The order of the learning content is suitable and easy to understand.	4.38	.56
1.3	The learning content is suitable based on the learning objectives.	4.45	.60
1.4	The learning content is appropriate based on the learning duration.	4.54	.57
1.5	Students are satisfied with the integration of local wisdoms in the course.	4.45	.60
Total		4.45	.56
(2) Learning Management			
2.1	Students are satisfied with the learning management as a whole.	4.53	.53
2.2	The teacher encourages learners to be able to learn on their own and emphasizes student-centered learning.	4.45	.60
2.3	Students are satisfied with the SAAOL learning Model.	4.44	.60
2.4	The learning material and media used in the course are suitable and clear.	4.45	.57
2.5	The criteria of evaluation and assessment of the course are clear, suitable, and validated based on the learning objectives.	4.55	.53
Total		4.48	.56
Summary		4.46	.56

Based on the interviews with teachers, their comments on each stage of learning management are as follows: In the stage of 'Self-Examination,' the teachers have encouraged their students to observe the learning contents and asked some interesting questions to get students' attention. Most teachers mentioned that most students were interested in studying 'Khalum' as it is the prohibition or community agreement to require people in the community to behave according to good ethics, written in the local language (Isan language). Although some of Khalum contain morals and virtues for living a good life, some of them do not seem to make sense for the students, for example, 'women should not sit with crossed legs,' 'one should not sit on the top of one's or others' bed,' 'wife should not sleep before her husband and should not get up after him,' 'one should not gossip during the meal,' and 'one should not eat buffalo meat'. The kinds of Khalum have gained students' attention the most as many students tried to understand why these prohibitions were practiced and followed in the past. This was a good opportunity for teachers to ask students to search for the answer and share their ideas with their classmates.

For 'Sim,' 'Pha Wed Cloth,' and 'Khun Mak Beng,' students were interested in their history, reasons, and the process of creation or construction, impacts, and role in the community. In the second stage 'Assemble,' the teachers allowed students to plan and facilitate the search to find answers to their questions. Most students searched for and googled the information on their mobile phones. Some students have asked for answers from their grandparents, relatives, elders, or even the local philosophers.

In the third stage 'Analyze Surrounding,' teachers encouraged and facilitated the students to analyze information learned from their search for associative answers based on Buddhist ideas and local wisdom. In this step, the students have related their answers to the beliefs of people in the community in the past. Most teachers mentioned that this way was very beneficial to encourage students to perform analytical and critical thinking. In the fourth stage, 'Open Mind and Experience,' teachers allowed students to share their experiences and share their analytical

results. This process got students' interest the most as their answers to the same question were not the same. They often asked other students to get more information on the questions they were interested in.

In the final step 'Life for all,' the teachers facilitated learning and allowed students to apply the learning outcomes to their daily lives. Most of the students said that the 'Sim,' 'Pha Wed Cloth,' and 'Khun Mak Beng,' they viewed it as valuable local architecture or products belonging to the community. Preserving these local wisdoms is to preserve the community identity inherited from their ancestors. Concerning Khalum, they viewed it as the codes of conduct that have been practiced in the past based on their belief in Buddhism and cultural norms, which can be used to create mutual understandings between new and older generations.

#### **4. Discussion**

The integration of local wisdom into educational practices is gaining recognition for its potential to enrich the learning experience and foster a deeper understanding of cultural heritage and community identity. This discussion section delves into the implications of our findings in the context of previous research, emphasizing the significance of incorporating local wisdom into the curriculum, as well as the positive impact of the SAAOL learning model on student satisfaction.

##### *4.1 Integration of Local Wisdom into the Curriculum*

Our study has highlighted the seamless integration of local wisdom, particularly 'Sim' and 'Khan Mak Beng,' into the course 'Buddhism' within the framework of the Basic Education Core Curriculum of 2008. This curriculum framework emphasizes the importance of students not only acquiring theoretical knowledge but also realizing and embodying the principles of good believers, regardless of whether they follow Buddhism or other respected religions. This approach aligns with the broader educational goals of promoting cultural awareness and understanding. This integration mirrors findings from previous research, shedding light on the benefits of infusing local wisdom into the educational landscape. Muenjaem's (2020) study conducted at Chiang Mai University explored the conservation and awareness-raising of Tai Lue local wisdom in Luang Nua Village, Chiang Mai Province. By utilizing a participatory action research process, this study revealed that integrating local wisdom into the curriculum had a profound impact on students. Notably, students exhibited heightened awareness and a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. This aligns with our findings, where students displayed a genuine interest in local wisdom, particularly 'Khalum,' and a curiosity to delve into its historical and cultural significance. Moreover, teachers in Muenjaem's study (2020) (Muenjaem, 2020) acknowledged the value of incorporating local wisdom into learning activities. This reflects the sentiments expressed by educators in our research, who noted the engagement and enthusiasm generated by teaching local wisdom. The connection to real-world cultural practices and traditions fostered a deeper level of comprehension and appreciation among students. Another study by Intaya (2019) at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University further underscores the positive outcomes of integrating local wisdom into the curriculum. The study focused on the development of the "moderate class, more knowledge" activity, drawing on local wisdom and learning resources. Results indicated that students' knowledge and understanding of activity implementation exceeded expectations, leading to highly positive learning experiences. Teachers recognized the suitability and effectiveness of these activities, echoing the sentiments of our educators.

##### *4.2 The SAAOL Learning Model and Student Satisfaction*

One of the most noteworthy findings of our research is the high level of student satisfaction with the SAAOL learning model. The model, designed to support the integration of local wisdom into the learning management of the 'Buddhism' course, received an impressive mean satisfaction score of 4.46 out of 5. This satisfaction aligns with prior research that has explored innovative learning models and their impact on student engagement and outcomes. The SAAOL model, comprising five stages—Self-Examination (S), Assemble (A), Analyze Surroundings (A), Open Mind and Experience (O), and Life for All (L)—facilitates a holistic and experiential learning approach. The concept of student-centered learning, where students take an active role in their education, is a recurrent theme in educational research. The SAAOL model's initial stage, 'Self-Examination,' encourages students to observe their learning content critically and pose thought-provoking questions. This fosters engagement and curiosity, prompting students to explore the subject matter more deeply. Findings from previous research by Dewey (1938) on experiential learning emphasize the value of inquiry-based approaches, where students actively participate in the learning process. Such approaches are known to enhance comprehension and critical thinking skills. In our research, students' enthusiasm for exploring 'Khalum' and other local wisdom reflects their engagement and motivation when learning is personalized and inquiry-driven. In the 'Assemble' stage of the SAAOL model, students are given the autonomy to plan and conduct research to answer their questions. This aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize students' active involvement in shaping their learning experiences. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) posits that learning is most

effective when students engage in social interaction and collaborative problem-solving. The ‘Assemble’ stage encourages students to collaborate, seek information, and share knowledge, echoing the principles of sociocultural theory. The subsequent stage, ‘Analyze Surroundings,’ involves critical thinking and reflection based on Buddhist ideas and local wisdom. This parallels research by Paul and Elder (2006), who advocate for critical thinking as a fundamental skill in education. Their model of critical thinking underscores the importance of analyzing information, considering multiple perspectives, and evaluating the quality of evidence—a process that aligns with the ‘Analyze Surroundings’ stage of the SAAOL model. In the ‘Open Mind and Experience’ stage, students share their diverse experiences and perspectives. This stage is reflective of constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the importance of social interaction and discourse in constructing knowledge (Von Glasersfeld, 1989). When students engage in dialogue, they co-construct meaning and deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Finally, the ‘Life for All’ stage encourages students to apply their learning to real-life situations. This application-oriented approach corresponds with the principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014). According to Kolb’s model, learning is most effective when it involves concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The ‘Life for All’ stage embodies this cycle of experiential learning, as students apply their knowledge to solve problems and create innovative solutions. Our research aligns with these educational theories, demonstrating that the SAAOL model’s student-centered and experiential approach contributes to high levels of satisfaction among students. The model not only enhances comprehension but also fosters critical thinking, collaborative skills, and the application of knowledge to real-world scenarios.

#### *4.3 Alignment with National Education Goals*

The integration of local wisdom into the curriculum and the successful implementation of the SAAOL learning model resonate with the broader goals outlined in the National Education Plan 2017–2036. This plan emphasizes the importance of tailoring education to local contexts and fostering a sense of community identity. According to the plan, educational institutions are encouraged to set learner development goals in line with local conditions and contexts. This aligns with our research, where local wisdom was integrated into the curriculum to reflect the cultural context of the studied area. Furthermore, the plan promotes education for people of all ages within the community by integrating educational services across different levels and related agencies. Our research embodies this approach by involving community members, educators, and students in the process of integrating local wisdom into education (Saikham et al., 2021). Local curriculum development that aligns with the geosocial area, occupations, and community needs is also encouraged by the plan. Our research exemplifies this by incorporating ‘Sim’, ‘Khan Mak Beng,’ ‘Khalum,’ and ‘Pha Wed Cloth’ into the curriculum, aligning with the cultural and community context. Additionally, the plan emphasizes the importance of learning management that instills love and pride in the community while preserving arts, culture, traditions, and values. Our research demonstrates that the SAAOL model not only enhances learning but also fosters a sense of pride in cultural heritage and community identity. Finally, the plan underscores the utilization of media, learning resources, and local wisdom in the learning management process. Our research embraces this directive by successfully integrating local wisdom into the curriculum and employing the SAAOL model to support learning.

In conclusion, our research underscores the profound impact of integrating local wisdom into the curriculum and employing the SAAOL learning model. These approaches not only enhance educational innovation but also garner high levels of satisfaction among students. The alignment with educational theories and national education goals further reinforces the value of these practices. Future research in this area may explore the long-term effects of integrating local wisdom into education, examining how it influences students' cultural awareness, community engagement, and career choices. Additionally, further investigation into the adaptability of the SAAOL model in diverse educational contexts would provide valuable insights into its potential for broader implementation. By embracing local wisdom and innovative learning models, educators have the opportunity to create meaningful and culturally relevant educational experiences that empower students to become active, engaged, and informed members of their communities.

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**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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