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Bridging Tradition and Technology Digital Curriculum Integration with Batak Local Language and Social Media for 3T Teachers in South Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of Batak local language preservation with digital curriculum development and social media utilization for teachers in remote, underdeveloped, and frontier (3T) regions of South Sumatra. The research employed a mixed-methods approach involving 45 teachers from 15 schools across isolated areas. Data collection utilized surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations over six months. Findings reveal significant challenges in technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and cultural-linguistic preservation. The mentoring program demonstrated that combining local language pedagogy with digital tools enhanced student engagement by 67% and improved teachers' digital competencies by 72%. Social media platforms emerged as effective vehicles for cultural content dissemination and professional development networks. The study concludes that integrated approaches honoring indigenous languages while embracing digital innovation create sustainable educational

improvements in marginalized communities. This research contributes to understanding how technology-enhanced pedagogy can coexist with cultural preservation in underserved educational contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The education landscape in Indonesia's remote, underdeveloped, and frontier regions, commonly referred to as 3T areas (Terdepan, Terluar, Tertinggal), faces multifaceted challenges that require innovative and culturally responsive interventions. South Sumatra, with its diverse ethnic compositions including significant Batak communities, presents unique opportunities to explore the intersection of local language preservation, digital curriculum integration, and contemporary pedagogical practices (García & Wei, 2022). The preservation of indigenous languages such as Batak within formal education systems has become increasingly critical as globalization and technological advancement threaten linguistic diversity worldwide. According to Hornberger and Link (2021), indigenous language maintenance in educational contexts requires deliberate policy interventions and pedagogical strategies that recognize language as a carrier of cultural identity and knowledge systems (Muhsyanur, 2023) (Muhsyanur et al., 2022).

The digital divide in Indonesia's 3T regions represents and contemporary pedagogical resources that are readily available in urban centers (Rahmawati & Zhang, 2023). However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption globally, creating unexpected opportunities for remote and underserved communities to leapfrog traditional development stages through mobile technology and internet connectivity (Dhawan, 2020). This phenomenon has particular relevance for 3T teachers who increasingly recognize social media platforms as potential tools for professional development, resource sharing, and student engagement. As noted by Greenhow et al. (2021), social media's affordances for collaborative learning and knowledge construction make it especially suitable for teachers in isolated contexts seeking to overcome geographical barriers (Muhsyanur et al., 2021; Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, 2023)The integration of local languages into digital curricula presents both opportunities and challenges for educational practitioners. Smith and Dalakoglou (2022) argue that digital technologies can serve as vehicles for linguistic revitalization when intentionally designed to support minority language use and transmission. For Batak language speakers in South Sumatra, digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to create, share, and preserve linguistic resources that might otherwise disappear due to dominant language pressures and intergenerational transmission gaps. Research by McCarty and Lee (2023) demonstrates that when indigenous languages are positioned as legitimate knowledge resources within formal education, students develop stronger cultural identities and achieve better academic outcomes across multiple domains.

Teacher capacity building in 3T regions requires approaches that acknowledge local contexts, cultural values, and practical constraints while introducing contemporary pedagogical innovations. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), effective teacher professional development must be sustained, content-focused, and embedded within teachers' daily practice rather than consisting of isolated workshop interventions. The mentoring model offers particular promise for 3T contexts where teachers may feel professionally isolated and lack access to peer networks and expert guidance (Aspfors & Fransson, 2022). By combining face-to-face interactions with digital communication tools, mentoring programs can provide ongoing support that respects cultural contexts while building technological competencies (Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023).

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for educational transformation, particularly in contexts where formal professional development opportunities are limited. Research by Trust et al. (2021) indicates that teachers who actively participate in social media-based professional learning networks report increased instructional confidence, expanded pedagogical repertoires, and stronger connections to educational communities. For 3T teachers, platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook offer accessible entry points for technological engagement that align with existing communication practices while providing pathways to more sophisticated digital literacy (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2020). The affordances of social media for multimodal content creation also align well with local language preservation efforts, as teachers can create and share audio, video, and text-based materials in Batak language that support culturally responsive pedagogy.

The convergence of local language preservation, digital curriculum development, and social media integration represents a promising frontier for educational innovation in marginalized communities. This study examines how a comprehensive mentoring program addressing these interconnected dimensions can strengthen teacher capacity and improve educational outcomes in South Sumatra's 3T regions. By positioning Batak language as a valuable educational resource rather than a barrier to learning, while simultaneously building teachers' digital competencies, this research explores how tradition and technology can mutually reinforce rather than conflict with each other (Paris & Alim, 2021). The findings contribute to growing scholarship on culturally sustaining pedagogy in digital age and offer practical insights for educational interventions in similar contexts worldwide.

METHOD

This research employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to comprehensively investigate the mentoring program's implementation and outcomes across multiple dimensions. The study was conducted over six months from January to June 2024 in 15 schools across remote districts of South Sumatra with significant Batak-speaking populations. Participants included 45 teachers working in 3T areas, selected through purposive sampling based on criteria

including teaching experience, willingness to engage with technology, and commitment to local language preservation (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data collection utilized multiple instruments including pre- and post-intervention surveys measuring digital literacy and pedagogical confidence using validated scales, semi-structured interviews exploring teachers' experiences and perceptions, focus group discussions examining community responses to the program, classroom observations documenting teaching practices, and analysis of digital artifacts created by teachers including lesson plans and social media content. The mentoring intervention consisted of three components: monthly face-to-face workshops on digital tools and Batak language pedagogy, ongoing support through WhatsApp groups and video conferencing, and collaborative curriculum development projects integrating local language and digital resources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Quantitative data analysis employed paired t-tests to assess changes in teacher competencies and student engagement measures, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase approach including familiarization, code generation, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Methodological rigor was ensured through triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking with participants to validate interpretations, maintenance of reflexive journals documenting researcher positionality, and thick description of contexts to support transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Ethical considerations included informed consent procedures, confidentiality protections, and recognition of power dynamics between external researchers and local educators.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Literacy Development Among 3T Teachers

The mentoring program resulted in substantial improvements in teachers' digital literacy competencies across multiple dimensions. Pre-intervention assessments revealed that 82% of participating teachers had minimal experience with digital educational tools beyond basic smartphone functions, while only 13% had ever created digital learning materials. Following the six-month intervention, post-assessments demonstrated that 72% of teachers achieved intermediate or advanced digital literacy levels, with significant gains in specific competencies including content creation, online communication, and digital resource curation. These findings align with research by Falloon (2020) who argues that sustained, practice-embedded professional development proves more effective than one-time training sessions in building teacher technological capacity. The importance of contextualized digital literacy development is further supported by Kimmons and Hall (2021), who emphasize that technological competencies must be developed within teachers' actual working conditions rather than idealized laboratory settings.

Teachers reported particular confidence gains in utilizing social media platforms for educational purposes, with 89% actively maintaining professional learning networks through WhatsApp groups by the program's conclusion. This outcome resonates with findings by Carpenter and Krutka (2022) demonstrating that

social media-based professional development creates sustainable communities of practice that extend beyond formal training periods. The accessibility of mobile-based platforms proved especially significant in 3T contexts where desktop computer access remains limited but smartphone penetration is relatively high (Bates et al., 2020). Teachers appreciated the immediacy of WhatsApp for sharing resources, asking questions, and receiving feedback from mentors and peers, describing it as democratizing access to expert knowledge that was previously geographically inaccessible.

However, infrastructure challenges continued to constrain digital integration despite teacher capacity improvements. Inconsistent internet connectivity affected 67% of participating schools, requiring teachers to develop offline-first approaches and creative workarounds for resource access. This finding underscores Warschauer's (2023) argument that digital divide encompasses not merely access but quality of access, technical support, and integration into meaningful practices. Teachers developed innovative strategies including downloading resources during periods of connectivity, creating offline resource repositories, and utilizing students' mobile data as backup connectivity options. These adaptive practices demonstrate the resourcefulness of 3T educators while highlighting persistent structural inequities requiring policy attention.

The integration of digital tools with existing pedagogical practices varied considerably across participants, suggesting that technological adoption is mediated by teachers' beliefs about learning and their perceived self-efficacy. According to Ertmer et al. (2021), teachers' pedagogical beliefs act as filters through which they interpret and implement technological innovations, often resulting in technology being used to reinforce rather than transform traditional practices. In this study, teachers who expressed constructivist orientations toward learning demonstrated more innovative applications of digital tools, including student-created multimedia projects and collaborative online activities. Conversely, teachers with transmission-oriented beliefs primarily used technology for content delivery and assessment, reflecting what Puentedura's (2020) SAMR model characterizes as substitution rather than transformation (Muhsyanur, 2024) (Santalia et al., 2025).

Professional identity shifts emerged as teachers increasingly recognized themselves as digital educators and cultural knowledge bearers simultaneously. This dual positioning proved empowering for many participants who had previously viewed technology and tradition as opposing forces. As described by Koehler et al. (2022), successful technology integration requires not merely technical skills but reconceptualization of teacher identity and pedagogical purpose. Teachers reported feeling more professionally connected to broader educational communities while simultaneously more grounded in their local cultural contexts, suggesting that digital connectivity can enhance rather than diminish place-based pedagogical commitments when thoughtfully implemented.

Local Language Integration in Digital Curriculum

The integration of Batak language into digital curriculum materials represented both a significant achievement and an ongoing challenge for participating teachers. At the program's outset, only 27% of teachers regularly incorporated Batak language into their instruction despite most being native speakers and serving predominantly Batak-speaking student populations. This disconnect reflects broader patterns of linguistic marginalization in Indonesian education where Bahasa Indonesia dominates formal schooling, often positioning local languages as obstacles to academic achievement rather than resources for learning (Alamsyah & Taopan, 2021). Following the intervention, 76% of teachers regularly incorporated Batak language into lessons across multiple subject areas, with particularly strong integration in social studies, arts, and language instruction.

Teachers developed diverse strategies for bilingual and multilingual pedagogy utilizing digital tools to support translanguaging practices. Translanguaging, as theorized by García and Li (2022), refers to the fluid languaging practices of multilingual individuals who draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire rather than keeping languages separate. Digital tools proved especially conducive to translanguaging pedagogy as teachers created multimedia materials incorporating Batak oral traditions, Indonesian academic language, and visual supports that together scaffolded student understanding. For example, teachers produced video lessons featuring Batak storytelling traditions with Indonesian subtitles and graphic organizers, allowing students to access curriculum content through multiple linguistic and semiotic channels simultaneously.

Student engagement and comprehension increased markedly when instruction incorporated Batak language, particularly for early elementary grades where students' Indonesian proficiency remained developing. Observational data revealed that lessons integrating Batak language generated 67% higher student participation rates as measured by voluntary contributions, question-asking, and task completion compared to Indonesian-only instruction. This finding supports extensive research demonstrating mother tongue-based multilingual education's cognitive and affective benefits (Ball & McBride, 2020). When students can access new concepts through their home language while simultaneously developing academic language proficiency, they develop deeper understanding and maintain stronger motivation for learning (Cummins, 2021).

Community responses to Batak language integration proved overwhelmingly positive, with parents and elders expressing appreciation for schools' recognition of cultural heritage. Focus group discussions revealed that many community members had internalized dominant narratives positioning local languages as backwards or impediments to children's advancement, yet simultaneously harbored concerns about language loss and cultural erosion (Muhsyanur et.al, 2025). The digital curriculum materials developed by teachers became community resources shared through social media and used in informal educational settings, extending the program's impact beyond school walls. This community uptake reflects what

McCarty and Nicholas (2023) describe as language reclamation's social movement dimensions, where educational interventions can catalyze broader community revitalization efforts.

Challenges in Batak language integration included limited standardized orthography, absence of technical vocabulary for contemporary subject matter, and teachers' varying levels of metalinguistic awareness about Batak grammar and structure. These obstacles necessitated collaborative problem-solving among teachers, elders, and language experts to develop consistent writing conventions and expand lexical resources. According to Hinton et al. (2022), language revitalization in educational contexts often requires simultaneous corpus planning to develop written resources and status planning to elevate language prestige. The digital tools accessible through this program—including word processing, audio recording, and video editing—proved valuable for documentation and standardization efforts that previous generations lacked access to, suggesting technology's potential role in accelerating language preservation initiatives.

Social Media as Professional Development Platform

Social media platforms emerged as transformative vehicles for professional development, peer collaboration, and resource sharing among 3T teachers who previously experienced significant professional isolation. The mentoring program established WhatsApp groups as primary communication channels, supplemented by Facebook pages for resource repositories and Instagram accounts showcasing classroom innovations. Within three months, these platforms generated organic professional learning communities characterized by daily interactions, resource sharing, problem-solving discussions, and mutual encouragement. This finding aligns with research by Lantz-Andersson et al. (2020) demonstrating that social media's affordances for informal, ongoing communication prove particularly valuable for teachers in remote contexts lacking access to formal professional development opportunities (Muhsyanur et al., 2021).

Teachers reported that social media-based professional learning felt more authentic and responsive to their actual classroom challenges compared to traditional professional development workshops. The immediacy of receiving peer feedback on lesson ideas, the ability to share photos and videos of student work for collaborative analysis, and the flexibility to engage during available moments rather than scheduled times all contributed to sustained participation. According to Rehm and Notten (2021), social media's asynchronous yet responsive nature allows teachers to participate in professional learning at their own pace while maintaining connection to broader communities. Teachers particularly valued receiving practical suggestions from peers facing similar contextual constraints rather than advice from external experts who might not understand 3T realities.

The program cultivated what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) conceptualize as communities of practice—groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular

interaction. Within the WhatsApp groups, distinct roles emerged organically including resource curators who regularly shared materials, problem-solvers who responded to technical questions, encouragers who provided emotional support, and innovators who pushed the group toward new practices. This distributed expertise model proved more sustainable than traditional hub-and-spoke professional development structures where knowledge flows unidirectionally from experts to practitioners (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2022).

Social media also functioned as a platform for celebrating successes and sharing student achievements, contributing to teacher motivation and professional identity development. Teachers posted photos and videos of students engaged in learning activities, Batak language projects, and community events, generating positive feedback loops that reinforced innovative practices. This public dimension of practice aligns with research by Greenhow and Lewin (2021) indicating that social media creates opportunities for teachers to build professional visibility and recognition often unavailable in isolated school contexts. Several teachers reported that sharing their work on social media led to invitations to present at local education conferences and recognition from district officials, elevating their professional status.

Challenges associated with social media use included concerns about privacy, misinformation, and platform dependency. Some teachers expressed discomfort with the blurred boundaries between personal and professional identities on social media, while others worried about sharing student information even with consent. Additionally, the reliance on proprietary platforms controlled by commercial entities created vulnerabilities regarding data ownership, platform changes, and long-term sustainability. As noted by Selwyn (2023), critical engagement with educational technology requires acknowledging corporate interests shaping digital platforms and considering alternatives including open-source and teacher-controlled communication systems. The program addressed these concerns through explicit discussions about digital citizenship, privacy protections, and platform alternatives, while recognizing that teachers' existing social media familiarity made these platforms pragmatic starting points despite their limitations.

Curriculum Adaptation and Cultural Responsiveness

The development of culturally responsive curriculum materials integrating Batak language, local knowledge, and digital tools represented the program's most complex and impactful dimension. Teachers worked collaboratively to design learning experiences honoring cultural heritage while meeting national curriculum standards and preparing students for participation in broader Indonesian society. This balancing act reflects ongoing tensions in education between standardization and localization, national identity formation and cultural diversity maintenance (Spring, 2023). The curricular materials developed included digital storybooks featuring Batak folktales with audio narration, multimedia social studies units exploring local history and geography, mathematics problems contextualized in

community practices such as traditional textiles and agriculture, and science lessons connecting traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary scientific concepts.

Table 1 presents a summary of curriculum adaptations developed across subject areas, illustrating the breadth of integration achieved:

Table 1. Curriculum Adaptations Across Subject Areas

Subject Area	Curriculum Adaptation	Digital Tools Utilized	Batak Language Integration	Student Engagement Impact
Language Arts	Digital storytelling with Batak folktales	Video editing, audio recording	Primary language for oral traditions, bilingual written texts	78% increase in voluntary reading
Mathematics	Contextual problems using traditional practices	Spreadsheets, educational apps	Mathematical terminology in Batak with Indonesian equivalents	64% improvement in problem-solving
Social Studies	Local history and geography multimedia units	GIS mapping, multimedia presentations	Batak as primary language with Indonesian academic terms	82% increase in project completion
Science	Traditional ecological knowledge integrated with scientific concepts	Photo documentation, research databases	Batak plant and animal names with scientific classifications	71% higher inquiry participation
Arts	Traditional music and craft digitally documented	Audio recording, video tutorials	Batak as language of instruction for cultural practices	89% increased family involvement

The curriculum adaptations demonstrated that local knowledge and languages can enhance rather than conflict with academic achievement when positioned as legitimate epistemic resources. Students demonstrated stronger conceptual understanding when new ideas connected to familiar cultural contexts, supporting funds of knowledge theory which posits that households and communities possess valuable knowledge bases that schools should recognize and build upon (González et al., 2020). For example, mathematics lessons exploring geometric patterns in traditional Batak textiles helped students develop spatial reasoning skills while

honoring cultural heritage, resulting in both increased engagement and improved assessment outcomes compared to decontextualized textbook approaches.

Teachers reported that developing culturally responsive curriculum required significant intellectual work including research into cultural traditions, collaboration with community elders, alignment with standards, and creative integration of multiple knowledge systems. This labor-intensive process challenges deficit perspectives that position 3T teachers as lacking capacity, instead revealing sophisticated pedagogical reasoning and cultural expertise. According to Ladson-Billings (2021), culturally responsive teaching demands deep knowledge of both subject matter and students' cultural backgrounds, representing a form of expertise often invisible in mainstream educational discourse. The mentoring program's recognition and support of this work proved validating for teachers who had previously doubted whether their cultural knowledge had educational value.

Community involvement in curriculum development strengthened both the educational materials and school-community relationships. Elders contributed oral histories, traditional stories, and specialized knowledge about practices such as medicinal plants and agricultural cycles, which teachers then incorporated into digital learning materials. This intergenerational collaboration addressed concerns about knowledge transmission gaps while elevating elders' status as educators. Parents reported increased engagement with their children's schooling and greater confidence that education preserved rather than eroded cultural identity (Castagno & Brayboy, 2022). These community impacts suggest that culturally responsive curriculum serves purposes beyond individual student achievement, contributing to collective cultural vitality and social cohesion.

Sustainability of curriculum innovation remained a concern as teachers balanced new practices with standardized testing pressures and administrative expectations. While most administrators expressed support for cultural integration, structural factors including national examinations, textbook mandates, and time constraints created competing demands on teachers' attention. Research by Au (2023) documents how high-stakes testing regimes often narrow curriculum toward tested content, marginalizing culturally responsive practices. Teachers navigated these tensions by strategically embedding Batak language and cultural content within required curriculum rather than treating it as supplementary enrichment, demonstrating what Paris and Alim (2021) describe as culturally sustaining pedagogy that maintains cultural lifeways while supporting students' academic and social success across multiple contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that integrated approaches to teacher mentoring addressing local language preservation, digital curriculum development, and social media engagement can effectively strengthen educational quality in 3T regions while honoring cultural heritage. The program's success stemmed from recognizing that tradition and technology need not conflict but can mutually reinforce when teachers

receive sustained support to develop both cultural expertise and digital competencies simultaneously. By positioning Batak language as a valuable educational resource and social media as accessible professional development infrastructure, the intervention created pathways for marginalized educators to access contemporary pedagogical innovations while preserving linguistic and cultural diversity. Moving forward, educational policy and practice in Indonesia's 3T regions must address persistent infrastructure inequities while building on the demonstrated capacity of local educators to create culturally responsive, technologically enhanced learning experiences. This study contributes to growing evidence that educational equity requires not standardization but rather thoughtful adaptation honoring local contexts, languages, and knowledge systems while providing access to resources historically concentrated in urban centers.

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