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Sipanundu' Madandan Traditional School as a Cultural Education Space for Preserving Local Wisdom

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ABSTRACT

Amid accelerating modernisation and digital globalisation, indigenous communities face mounting pressure to sustain intergenerational cultural transmission. This qualitative single-case study investigates *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School (*Sekolah Adat Sipanundu' Madandan*) — a non-formal indigenous learning institution established in Madandan sub-district, Tana Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia — as a cultural education space for preserving Torajan local wisdom. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and were subjected to interactive analysis (reduction, display, verification) with triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. Findings reveal seven interconnected roles fulfilled by the school: (1) reflective preservation of customary practices; (2) character education grounded in indigenous values; (3) intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge; (4) strengthening of Torajan identity; (5) complementary partnership with formal schooling and the church; (6) provision of a community dialogue space; and (7) revitalisation of Torajan language and artistic expression. Seven clusters of local wisdom values are identified as the pedagogical core, including *sipanundu'* (mutual support), *Tallulolona* (ecological equilibrium), *Sipakaboro'* (mutual care), and *kada disedan sarong* (oral ethical literature). Enabling factors include elder engagement, strong community ownership, and experiential learning methodology; inhibiting factors encompass digital cultural competition, facilitator regeneration urgency, funding constraints, and limited local government recognition. These findings contribute an ethno-pedagogical model demonstrating that community-based indigenous education can serve simultaneously as a mechanism of cultural heritage preservation, character formation, and social cohesion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Torajan people of highland South Sulawesi, Indonesia, constitute one of the oldest ethnic communities in the archipelago, distinguished by an extraordinarily rich material and intangible heritage (Baan et al., 2022; Tandiangga et al., 2026). Their

cultural system encompasses the iconic tongkonan longhouse, passura' woodcarving, complex kinship networks, and two ritual cycles of profound symbolic depth: rambu solo' (death ceremonies) and rambu tuka' (celebrations of life). Together, these elements represent a living repository of ancestral wisdom that has sustained social cohesion and ecological balance across generations (Girik Allo, 2024; Sendana et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, this heritage faces existential pressure from the dual forces of digital globalization and socioeconomic modernization. Ethnographic evidence from Tana Toraja indicates that younger generations are increasingly distanced from traditional practices, with social media platforms and digital entertainment displacing intergenerational engagement in customary ritual and oral literature (Noviani et al., 2025; Sanderan et al., 2025). This rupture in cultural continuity is compounded by the progressive attrition of elder knowledge-holders, many of whom are now in advanced old age and carry irreplaceable expertise in ceremonial practice, genealogical history, and ecological wisdom that remains largely undocumented.

Education has long been theorized as the primary vehicle for intergenerational cultural transmission (Yembuu, 2025; Scherger & Savage, 2010). However, Indonesia's national education system has been critiqued for producing cultural homogenization at the expense of local epistemic diversity (Jayadi et al., 2022; Nurman et al., 2022). In response, indigenous communities across the archipelago—from Papua to Kalimantan to Sulawesi—have established non-formal customary schools (*sekolah adat*) to reclaim cultural sovereignty and transmit ancestral values through experiential, community-rooted pedagogies (Aziz et al., 2024; Suarmika et al., 2022; Yatim et al., 2025).

One such institution is *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School, formally established on 22 January 2021 in Dulang, Madandan, Tana Toraja Regency. Initiated by the *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara Toraya* (AMAN Toraya) and affiliated with the *Yayasan Pendidikan Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (YPMAN), the school operates under the Indonesian Ministry of Culture's Directorate General for Cultural Protection and Tradition. Its founding philosophy — encapsulated in the principle *sipanundu'* (mutual support, guidance, and respect) reflects a holistic cosmological orientation grounding pedagogical practice in social, spiritual, and ecological balance.

Despite a growing body of research on indigenous schools in Indonesia (Andriana et al., 2025; Fiharsono et al., 2026; Sagita Krissandi et al., 2023), few studies have examined the multidimensional roles of such institutions as integrated cultural education spaces, particularly in the Torajan context. Existing literature tends to focus on policy dimensions or broad socio-cultural narratives without examining the lived pedagogical dynamics at community level. This study addresses that gap.

Three research questions guided the inquiry: (1) What roles does *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School play in transmitting cultural knowledge, ritual, and tradition to younger generations? (2) What values of local wisdom are embedded in and transmitted through the school's educational practices? (3) What factors enable or inhibit the school's effectiveness as a cultural education space? The study makes a dual contribution: theoretically, by advancing an ethno-pedagogical framework for understanding community-based cultural education; and practically, by providing

evidence-based insights for policy actors and indigenous communities seeking to institutionalize heritage preservation.

Literature Review

Local Wisdom and Its Pedagogical Significance

Local wisdom refers to the accumulated body of knowledge, practices, values, and beliefs that a community has developed through lived experience over centuries and transmitted across generations (Khoiriyah & Fahri, 2025; Mahaswa & Syaja, 2025). It is characterized by empirical rootedness, contextual adaptability, embeddedness in daily life, and integration with a community's cosmological worldview (Sakti et al., 2024). For the Torajan people, local wisdom is most visibly expressed in the philosophy of Aluk to Dolo, the ritual cycles of rambu solo' and rambu tuka', the ecological ethics of *Tallulolona*, and the social ethic of *sipanundu'*.

Sadri and Temaja (2025) argue that local wisdom constitutes the most culturally legitimate foundation for character education because it is not externally imposed but organically emerges from a community's historical consciousness. Zainuddin (2025) similarly contends that education grounded in local wisdom produces graduates who possess strong cultural identity alongside nationally relevant competencies, thereby resolving the tension between particularism and universalism in Indonesian education policy.

Indigenous Schools as Spaces of Cultural Education

Sekolah adat (customary schools) are non-formal educational institutions established by indigenous communities to transmit ancestral knowledge and values outside the state curriculum (Fatharini et al., 2024). Scholars have conceptualized these institutions variously as sites of cultural revitalization, spaces of pedagogical resistance to national homogenization, and mechanisms for mobilizing social capital (Utama et al., 2024). Wambrauw et al.'s (2019) study of Papua demonstrates that indigenous schools effectively preserve mother-tongue use and ritual practice; Rahmawati et al. (2025) find that values transmitted through Dayak customary schools demonstrate greater resistance to cultural erosion than those imparted through formal schooling due to their embeddedness in lived community contexts.

In the Torajan context, the role of tongkonan as an educational centre has been documented by Amirullah et al. (2024) and Tulak et al. (2026) examine the intersection of Torajan cultural values with wider social and institutional contexts. However, no prior study has systematically examined a dedicated Torajan customary school as a multifunctional cultural education space, the gap this research addresses.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically anchored in Biddle's Role Theory, which distinguishes between role expectation (community demands placed on an institution), role performance (observable behaviors fulfilling those demands), and role internalization (the process by which learners adopt cultural values as constitutive elements of their

identity) (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2023). This tripartite framework enables systematic analysis of how the school's institutional functions translate into measurable educational outcomes.

Complementing role theory, Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as simultaneously practiced (experienced), conceived (planned), and lived (imbued with meaning) provides a lens for understanding the customary school as a multidimensional educational environment (Napoletano et al., 2022). The concept of adaptive cultural preservation further informs the analysis by distinguishing between static conservation of cultural forms and dynamic preservation of core values, the latter being essential for cultural sustainability amid change (Šćekić et al., 2025).

2. METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative single-case study design, selected for its capacity to generate deep contextual understanding of a bounded, complex social phenomenon. The case unit is *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School, treated as a unique institutional entity within the Madandan indigenous community. A qualitative paradigm is appropriate given the study's interpretive orientation toward meaning, context, and process rather than causal measurement.

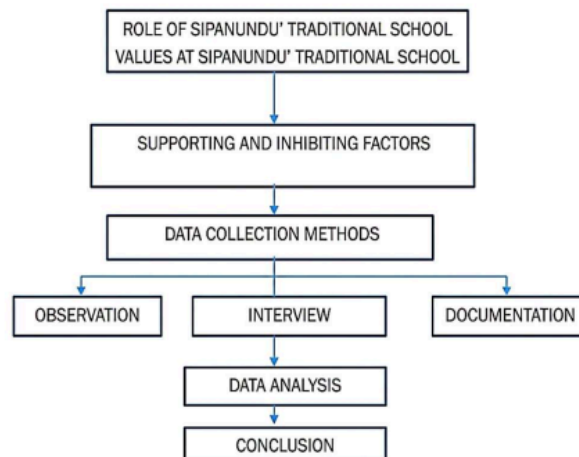


Figure 1. Research Design Scheme

Fieldwork was conducted at *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School, located in Dulang, Madandan sub-district, Rantetayo District, Tana Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi Province. The site was selected purposively as one of the few actively operating indigenous schools in the Torajan highlands. Data collection spans the period from January to March 2026, encompassing multiple learning cycles.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent three complementary perspectives: (1) institutional leaders and facilitators ($n = 6$), including the school principal, Marthina Palayukan, and senior cultural practitioners; (2) elder knowledge-holders serving as resource persons ($n = 4$), with ages ranging from 48 to 82 years; and (3) learners ($n = 9$) aged approximately 10 to 15 years and their parents ($n = 6$). Total participant count: 25 individuals. All participants provided informed consent; learner participation included parental consent.

Three complementary methods were employed. ³ In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participant categories using thematically organised protocols addressing roles, values, and enabling/inhibiting factors. Participatory observation was carried out across multiple learning sessions, including ritual practice, group activities, agricultural work, and elder narration, yielding detailed field notes. Document analysis encompassed the school's official curriculum (*Capaian Pembelajaran Phases A–D*), occupational documentation (identifikasi okupasi adat), institutional profile, and participants' questionnaire responses submitted to the 2024 National Indigenous Education Assembly.

⁵ Data were analysed using interactive model, comprising ⁵ three iterative stages: data reduction (systematic coding and thematic condensation of raw field material), data display (structured narrative and tabular organisation of emerging patterns), and conclusion drawing/verification (interpretive synthesis, validated through ongoing member-checking). Coding was conducted thematically, guided by the three research questions, and iteratively refined through constant comparison across data sources.

Trustworthiness was ensured through multiple triangulation strategies: source triangulation compared perspectives across school leaders, learners, elder resource persons, and parents; ⁴ method triangulation cross-checked interview accounts with observational data and documentary evidence; and ⁴ member-checking was conducted with key informants to confirm interpretive accuracy. Prolonged engagement across a twelve-week fieldwork period strengthened credibility.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Roles of *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School in Cultural Transmission

Comprehensive analysis of interview data, observational records, and institutional documents identified seven integrated roles through which the school operationalises its cultural education mandate. All roles are rooted in the founding philosophy of *sipanundu'* — mutual support, guidance, and respect — and are expressed through the school's seven strategic missions, from community-based learning to the cultivation of critical consciousness and cultural sovereignty.



Figure 2. Learning activities about Toraja carvings

Reflective Preservation of Torajan Custom and Cultural Practice

The school's primary function is to constitute a reflective learning space for Torajan values, ethics, norms, and customary practice. Crucially, the pedagogical orientation is interpretive rather than performative: learners are guided to understand the philosophical meanings embedded in ritual and symbolic tradition, not merely replicating its outward forms. The school principal articulated this orientation: "Here, the younger generation learns to understand what adat means and must comprehend it, not merely imitate." (Marthina Palayukan, February 2026). Document analysis of the school's formal curriculum reveals ten preservation domains, presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Cultural Preservation Domains in the *Sipanundu'* Madandan Curriculum

No.	Domain	Content Scope	Learning Method
1	Language & Oral Literature	Dialectal varieties, folklore (myths, fables, legends), riddles (karume), pantun (londe), ceremonial oratory (kada to minaa)	Conversation, storytelling, traditional songs
2	Ritual & Custom	Rambu tuka' and rambu solo' ceremonies, ritual symbols, traditional attire (Baju Pokko, Baju Toraja, Seppa Taluang Buku)	Participatory observation, demonstration
3	Tongkonan Architecture	Types (Layuk, Pekamberan, Batu Ariri), socio-cultural functions	Field visits, guided discussion
4	Traditional Arts	Music, dance, visual arts, traditional crafts	Hands-on practice, public performance
5	Folk Games	Sisemba', Meriam Bambu, Si'goli, Ma'kare, Ma'tite, Lari Karung	Direct play
6	Traditional Skills	Weaving, woodcarving, stone sculpting, taro chip production	Apprenticeship-style practice
7	Ecological Wisdom	Rice and corn cultivation, vegetable gardening, coffee farming, food sovereignty	Agricultural practice, school garden
8	Customary Marriage	Rampanan Kapa' (three levels), ceremonial procedures and meanings	Elder narration, focused discussion
9	Proverbial Expressions	Customary idioms and Torajan life philosophy	Memorisation, meaning-making dialogue
10	Traditional Cuisine	Pantollo Lendong, Pa'piong, Deppa Tori, Pokon, Tuak, etc.	Cooking practice, ingredient recognition

Structurally, the school operates on a weekly Friday afternoon schedule, ensuring complementarity with the national school timetable. Its official curriculum is organised into four progressive learning phases (A, B, C, D), paralleling the elementary-to-secondary continuum, and ranges from introductory symbolic literacy to advanced

analysis of philosophical frameworks such as *Tallulolona* and the maxim Misa' Kada Dipotuo, Pantan Kada Dipomate, affirming the institution's identity as a systematic ethno-pedagogical centre.

Character Education Grounded in Torajan Local Wisdom

The school functions as a space for embodied character formation, transmitting moral values not through didactic instruction but through experiential engagement in customary habits, ritual, and social relations. The pedagogical focus centres on the philosophy of *sipanundu'* supplemented by principles of gotong royong (communal cooperation), integrity, and spiritual-social care. The school principal described this process: "*Through the customary learning process, learners develop character so that they understand siri' (dignity), mutual respect, gotong royong, karapasan lan lu tondok (social harmony), and social responsibility.*" (Marthina Palayukan, February 2026).

Transmission methods include four complementary approaches: (1) modelling, in which customary leaders embody values in daily interaction; (2) oral narrative (ulelean, karume) as vehicles for moral and spiritual meaning; (3) participatory dialogue for reflective understanding; and (4) experiential learning through ritual involvement and communal labour. Multiple informants confirmed observable changes in learner behaviour across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions, including increased courtesy, disciplined adherence to customary norms, and active pride in Torajan identity.

Intergenerational Transmission of Ancestral Knowledge

The school serves as the primary institutional bridge for transmitting knowledge that resides predominantly in the oral tradition, including tongkonan genealogies, customary law, rambu ritual procedures, *Tallulolona* ecological philosophy, and the literary corpus of passura' carving symbolism and oral poetics. This role carries acute urgency: most key knowledge-holders are between 65 and 82 years of age, and the intellectual wealth they carry — encompassing ceremonial procedure, historical narrative, and philosophical system — remains largely undocumented in written form.

A senior customary elder stated: "*The customary school is not only teaching adat and culture as knowledge, but as a way of life rooted in respect for Puang Matua, ancestors, fellow human beings, and nature. It is a bridge between the old and young so that ancestral knowledge, ritual meaning, and spiritual values are not eroded by time.*" (Elder Knowledge-Holder, February 2026).

The school's 15 tutors span multiple generations (ages 25 to 82), themselves embodying the value of '*sipanundu'* in the very composition of its teaching body. Documentation of occupational domains across ten categories provides a systematic archive enabling future retrieval and transmission.

Strengthening Torajan Identity Among Young People

The school occupies a strategic role in countering identity crises produced by global popular culture hegemony. Through explicit curricula on local history, tongkonan

genealogy, traditional attire, and the contemporary relevance of customary values, the school facilitates a process of cultural re-identification. Learner responses reflect this transformation: *"I realise that adat is not merely old tradition but contains life values of great importance. Joining customary school, I feel prouder to be Torajan and motivated to preserve our culture."* (Learner, February 2026).

Structured interview data from nine learners (Table 2, in the tables section) consistently revealed a shift from perceiving adat as archaic to appreciating it as a living compass. The use of Torajan as the principal medium of instruction, combined with public performances in traditional dress, further concretises identity formation.

Complementary Partnership with Formal Education and the Church

Positioning itself as a complementary rather than competing institution, the school schedules sessions on Friday afternoons, ensuring zero scheduling conflict with formal schooling. All 27 enrolled learners simultaneously attend formal schools, confirming the complementary relationship. The principal explained: *"Sipanundu' Madandan customary school complements formal education and church formation with contextual education, where customary values aligned with Christian faith and ethics become the foundation for forming whole persons: intelligent, faithful, and cultured."* (Marthina Palayukan, February 2026).

The school's participation in the 2024 National Indigenous Education Assembly (*Musyawah Besar*) and its YPMAN network affiliation further extend its complementary function to a national scale, positioning the community as a contributor to the archipelago-wide discourse on indigenous pedagogy.

Space for Community Dialogue and Customary Conflict Resolution

The school functions as a social institution maintaining community harmony through *kombongan adat* (customary deliberation) the traditional mechanism of communal decision-making and peaceful conflict resolution. Through simulations of *kombongan* processes and case studies of historical customary resolutions, learners acquire practical competencies in principled dialogue, guided by the ethics of *sipanundu'*, *Sipakaboro'*, and *siangga'*. A senior elder observed: *"I see many positive changes. Children and young people are more respectful of their elders, peers, and teachers, and are more interested in participating in community adat activities."* (Elder, February 2026).



Figure 3. Ma'kombongan simulation

Preservation of Torajan Language and Artistic Expression

Recognising the Torajan language as a container of philosophy and worldview rather than merely a communication tool, the school employs a naturalistic language acquisition approach through everyday conversation, folklore (ulelean pare), proverbial expression, and riddles (karume). In the performing arts, learners engage with instruments including passuling and pa'pompang, and ritual dances from ma'gellu to the sacred ma'badong. Visual arts instruction covers weaving, tau-tau sculpture, and the symbolic grammar of Torajan carving motifs. This comprehensive programme positions the school as a dynamic space where the intellectual and aesthetic heritage of Torajan civilisation is actively reproduced, not merely archived. Table 2 summarises all seven roles with their implementation evidence and success indicators.

Table 2. Roles of *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School in Cultural Transmission and Their Success Indicators

No.	Role	Concrete Implementation	Success Indicators
1	Cultural & customary preservation	Instruction on meaning of rambu tuka'/solo' ceremonies, cultural symbols, local language, customary law	Learners can explain ritual meanings and cultural symbols
2	Character education grounded in local wisdom	Internalisation of <i>sipanundu'</i> , gotong royong, responsibility, and honesty through experiential practice	Behavioural change: greater courtesy, respect for elders, responsibility
3	Inter-generational transmission of ancestral knowledge	Elder-narrated sessions, <i>Tallulolona</i> , tongkonan history, kada disedan	Transmission secured before elder knowledge-holders pass away
4	Strengthening Torajan identity	Village history, traditional dress, arts performances, dialogue on relevance of adat	Learners express pride in Torajan identity and actively preserve culture
5	Complementary partner to formal schooling & the church	Friday afternoon sessions, alignment of customary–Christian values, YPMAN/AMAN partnership	No scheduling conflict; customary and faith values mutually reinforce
6	Space for community dialogue & customary dispute resolution	Kombongan adat simulation, customary law study, community discussion	Learners understand adat deliberation and customary legal mechanisms
7	Preservation of language & artistic expression	Instruction through ulelean, karume, songs, dance, traditional music of Toraja	Learners speak Torajan and perform in cultural arts settings

Local Wisdom Values Embedded in *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School

Seven clusters of local wisdom values constitute the pedagogical core of the school's curriculum. These are not transmitted through verbal instruction alone but are lived through practice, ritual, and communal interaction.



Figure 4. Learning Folk Tales, Riddles (*Karume*) and Pantun (*Londe*)

Sipanundu': Mutual Support as Educational Philosophy

The value of *sipanundu'* is simultaneously the school's name, animating spirit, and institutional identity. It encompasses mutual support, mutual guidance, mutual respect, and the maintenance of equilibrium between human beings, between humans and their Creator, and between humans and nature. This tripartite relational structure — social, spiritual, and ecological encapsulates a holistic cosmology that exceeds the transactional social capital concept, embedding trust and reciprocity within a transcendent moral framework. In pedagogical practice, *sipanundu'* is operationalised through collaborative task design, leadership rotation, and intergenerational dialogue that give learners direct experience of leading and following responsibly.



Figure 5. Students guide their friends in dancing

Tallulolona: Ecological Wisdom

Tallulolona articulates the sacred equilibrium between lolo tau (human beings), lolo patuan (animals), and lolo tananan (plants). It frames agriculture, livestock-keeping, and cultivation not as economic activities alone but as dimensions of ceremonial obligation within the principle *aluk sipori ada' lan Tondok lepongan bulan*. Practically implemented through the school garden, learners cultivate taro and coffee while developing a relational rather than extractive orientation toward the natural world. This constitutes an indigenous articulation of ecological interdependence that predates Western sustainability discourse by centuries.

Sipakaboro' and Siangga': Mutual Affection and Mutual Esteem

Sipakaboro' (mutual care/love) and *siangga'* (mutual respect) regulate the affective and tonal dimensions of social life in Torajan culture. *Sipakaboro'* is transmitted through oral narratives portraying communal care, through the visible solidarity of ritual participation, and through cooperative work. *Siangga'* governs protocols for addressing elders and facilitators, behaviour in ritual settings, and recognition of each community member's contribution. Multiple informant accounts — from elders, parents, and facilitators — consistently report increased courtesy, improved speech registers, and greater empathy in learners following participation, providing convergent validation of value internalisation.



Figure 6. Students greet the facilitator

Honesty, Responsibility, and Customary Integrity

These three interrelated values form the ethical infrastructure of social trust in the Torajan community. Customary integrity (*integritas adat*) extends beyond individual honesty to encompass collective fidelity to agreements reached in deliberative councils. The school transmits these values not through moral lecturing but through actual accountability structures: learners assigned responsibilities for leading sessions, stewarding equipment, or reporting ritual observations are expected to fulfil those roles with full commitment, with community response taking a constructive, guiding rather than punitive form.

Kada Disedan Sarong Dianna Batu Silambi': Oral Ethics and Life Guidance

This corpus of customary prayers, aphorisms, and ethical counsel constitutes one of Toraja's most valuable intangible literary heritages. The phrase *disedan* signifies the use of figurative, metaphorical language drawn from nature; *sarong dianna batu silambi'* ('like a luminous stone') adds an aesthetic dimension, rendering ethical instruction simultaneously a literary experience. Taught by Marthen Rantetonglo (age 63), this material appears in the Phase D (Grades 7–9) curriculum as a core learning outcome, reflecting the school's commitment to making ancestral literary wisdom a constitutive element of learner formation rather than a peripheral curiosity.



Figure 7. Students listen to Kada learning in the sedan sarong

Solidarity and Communal Gotong Royong

Solidarity and cooperative communal labour are the most empirically observable values in the school's daily operation and the most frequently identified by all informant categories as successfully internalised. The school's design intentionally structures all major activities to require collective effort, making cooperation an experiential rather than didactic learning outcome. Learner accounts capture the ontological dimension of this value: the Torajan worldview understands humans as inherently relational beings embedded in webs of kinship, tongkonan, and community — gotong royong is therefore not instrumental efficiency but an expression of a shared understanding of what it means to exist.

Torajan Spirituality: Reverence for Puang Matua, Ancestors, and Cosmic Harmony

Spiritual value pervades all dimensions of learning as the cosmological background against which all other values are intelligible. In the context of the Christian Torajan community, this spirituality is expressed through harmonisation of indigenous cosmology with Christian faith, as articulated by an elder informant: "*For us, indigenous life, religion, and education do not contradict one another but complement each other. Adat teaches life values. Religion teaches faith and morality. Education shapes how we think. The customary school is the space to align the three.*" (Elder, February 2026). Facilitators report observable manifestations including gratitude, environmental care, and compassion as spiritual fruits emerging from the curriculum. Table 3 synthesises the seven value clusters with their pedagogical methods and observed outcomes.

Table 3. Local Wisdom Values in the *Sipanundu'* Madandan Curriculum

No.	Value	Dimension	Pedagogical Method	Observed Outcome
1	<i>Sipanundu'</i>	Social, spiritual, ecological	Group work, direct practice	Solidarity, mutual care, shared responsibility
2	<i>Tallulolona</i>	Ecological, cosmological	Gardening, farming, nature observation	Environmental consciousness, love of nature, ecological responsibility

No.	Value	Dimension	Pedagogical Method	Observed Outcome
3	<i>Sipakaboro'</i> and <i>Siangga'</i>	Relational, empathic	Role modelling, peer support, dialogue	Courtesy, empathy, respect for elders and peers
4	Honesty & customary integrity	Ethical, juridical	Accountability, kombongan simulation	Honesty, responsibility, customary discipline
5	<i>Kada disedan sarong dianna batu silambi'</i>	Literary, spiritual, ethical	Elder narration, oral tradition, ancestral stories	Love of oral literature, understanding of ancestral values
6	Solidarity & gotong royong	Social, communal	Collaborative activities, communal work	Solidarity, co-operation, sense of community belonging
7	Torajan spirituality	Transcendent, holistic	Ritual instruction, customary prayer, reflection	Meaningful ritual participation, harmony of faith and adat

Enabling and Inhibiting Factors

Enabling Factors

Six factors were identified as enabling the school's effectiveness. First, the active involvement of customary leaders and elders, including advisors aged 80 and 82, provides irreplaceable cultural legitimacy and knowledge authenticity. The school principal stressed: "*The presence of customary leaders gives legitimacy, value direction, and ensures that the school remains faithful to the norms and philosophy of Sipanundu' Madandan adat.*" (Marthina Palayukan, February 2026). Second, strong community and parental support reflect the school's bottom-up, community-initiated origin through kombongan adat (22 January 2021), generating a sense of ownership that constitutes the most durable form of institutional social capital. Third, the contextualised experiential learning methodology — combining learning-by-doing, modelling, oral narrative, and participatory dialogue — engages all three learning dimensions (cognitive, affective, psychomotor) simultaneously. Fourth, YPMAN institutional network support provides access to legal legitimacy, inter-school knowledge exchange, and national advocacy platforms. Fifth, a supportive national regulatory framework (Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System; Law No. 5/2017 on Cultural Advancement; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, ratified via Presidential Regulation No. 78/2007) establishes the school's right to state support. Sixth, learner enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation — evidenced by voluntary desire to understand meaning and take on custodianship of culture — constitutes a strong predictor of long-term value internalisation.

Inhibiting Factors

Six inhibiting factors were identified. First, the hegemony of digital modernisation diverts youth attention toward global popular culture while eroding domestic spaces for intergenerational interaction and mother-tongue use. Second, the urgency of facilitator regeneration presents a structural vulnerability: several primary knowledge-holders are

in advanced old age, and the pipeline of young facilitators (currently three tutors aged 25–26) is insufficient relative to need. Third, operational funding limitations, currently met through community self-funding and supplemented by taro chip sales (a local wisdom enterprise integrating *Tallulolona* values), cannot reliably sustain full programme costs. Fourth, social stigma toward customary education persists in some quarters, reflecting a role conflict between pressures of formal educational credential-seeking and the value of indigenous learning. Fifth, time competition with formal schooling and major ritual events such as rambu solo' produces inconsistent learner attendance, though the Friday afternoon schedule substantially mitigates this tension. Sixth, insufficient concrete local government support, despite existing regulatory frameworks, creates resource constraints and limits formal recognition that would strengthen advocacy and access to funding. Table 4 presents all enabling and inhibiting factors alongside their institutional impacts and response strategies.

Table 4. Enabling and Inhibiting Factors and Institutional Response Strategies

No.	Factor	Type	Impact	Response Strategy
1	Active involvement of customary leaders & elders	Enabling	Provides cultural legitimacy, authority, and irreplaceable knowledge	Regular elder participation; urgent knowledge documentation
2	Community and parental support	Enabling	Ownership, self-funded resources, active participation	Regular community-school forums; parental involvement programmes
3	Experience learning approach	Enabling	Deep, enduring value internalisation	Sustain and expand experience-based methods; reduce lecturing
4	YPMAN institutional network & national regulation	Enabling	Institutional legitimacy, access to national knowledge exchange, resource opportunities	Strengthen AMAN forum participation; develop new partnerships
5	National regulatory framework	Enabling	Legal foundation for existence and demands for government support	Use regulation as advocacy argument with local government
6	Learner enthusiasm	Enabling	Strong intrinsic motivation fosters effective value internalisation	Maintain engaging, relevant methods; involve learners in planning
7	Modernisation & digital culture	Inhibiting	Diverts youth attention from local to global culture	Integrate technology as documentation tool; connect adat to contemporary issues
8	Limited facilitators & regeneration urgency	Inhibiting	Risk of knowledge chain rupture; limited teaching capacity	Youth cadre development; intensive training; urgent knowledge documentation

No.	Factor	Type	Impact	Response Strategy
9	Limited operational funding	Inhibiting	Disrupts programme continuity and learning material procurement	Diversify funding; develop local wisdom-based products; advocate to local government
10	Social stigma toward customary education	Inhibiting	Negative perceptions persist in part of the community	Communicate relevance of customary education as complement, not competitor, to formal schooling
11	Time competition with formal schooling & cultural events	Inhibiting	Inconsistent attendance; scheduling disruption	Coordinate with formal teachers and parents; integrate ritual experiences
12	Insufficient local government support	Inhibiting	Resource constraints and lack of formal recognition	Regulatory-based advocacy; document impact; develop strategic partnerships

Discussion

School as a Multifunctional Cultural Education Space: A Role-Theoretical Analysis

Applying Biddle's role theory, Sipanundu' Madandan Traditional School demonstrates strong alignment between role expectation, role performance, and role internalization (Anglin et al., 2022). Community expectations for the school to function as a living repository and transmitter of Torajan cultural heritage are clearly articulated and historically motivated. These expectations find systematic expression in seven observable institutional roles—a degree of role-performance breadth that distinguishes this institution from prior case studies of Indonesian indigenous schools (Andriana et al., 2025; Wambrauw et al., 2019), where single or dual functions tend to dominate reported findings.

The multifunctionality identified here—spanning cultural preservation, character formation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, identity strengthening, institutional partnership, community dialogue, and linguistic revitalization—is not a structural weakness but reflects the constitutively holistic nature of indigenous education systems, in which knowledge, ethics, spirituality, and social organization are indissoluble. This finding resonates with Cohen's (2025) argument that community-based education must be understood as an equal partner to formal schooling, not a residual supplement, due to its capacity to address educational dimensions, including cultural identity formation and communal ethics—that the state system systematically neglects.

Viewed through Lefebvre's spatial triad, the customary school operates simultaneously as practiced space (the Friday afternoon gathering at and around the tongkonan), conceived space (the structured curriculum and institutional mission documents), and lived space (the experiential formation of meaning, memory, and

identity) (Nejad et al., 2019). The integration of all three spatial dimensions accounts for the depth of value internalization reported across informant categories. Biesta's (2017) notion of the emancipatory educational space—one in which learners develop critical agency rather than passive reception—is further exemplified in the school's emphasis on reflective understanding over ritual replication and in the participatory dialogue structures that invite learners to interrogate and articulate the contemporary relevance of ancestral wisdom.

Compared with Sartika et al.'s (2024) study of the Ammatoa Kajang customary school in South Sulawesi, *Sipanundu' Madandan* demonstrates a more systematically multidimensional curriculum, incorporating language, arts, ecology, life skills, and food sovereignty within a single integrated programme. This curricular comprehensiveness reflects a mature ethno-pedagogical design and positions the school as a replicable model for other Indigenous communities.

Local Wisdom Values: Universality and Contemporary Relevance

The seven local wisdom values identified constitute a coherent ethical system with resonances that extend well beyond the Torajan cultural context. Analyzed through Putnam's social capital theory (Gelderblom, 2018), "*sipanundu*" represents a culturally embedded form of trust and reciprocal norms that exceed generic social capital by incorporating transcendent (spiritual) and ecological dimensions, making it a more comprehensive and potentially more durable foundation for community cohesion.

The value of Tallulolona demands particular attention in the context of contemporary sustainability discourse. Dreamson and Kim (2022) argue that education for sustainability requires a paradigm shift from extractive to relational understandings of the human-nature relationship; *Tallulolona* constitutes precisely such a relational paradigm, one elaborated a century before Western environmental ethics formalized the concept of ecological interdependence. The pedagogical deployment of Tallulolona through school gardens and agricultural practice exemplifies what Pratama et al. (2025) calls "adaptive cultural preservation"—maintaining the value core while translating it into productive, experientially grounded practices relevant to contemporary learners.

The transmission of *Kada disedan sarong dianna batu silambi'* as a core curricular outcome (*Phase D*), reflects a sophisticated understanding of the aesthetic dimension of ethical education. The literary beauty of the metaphorical language makes moral instruction engaging rather than didactic, a finding that aligns with Gardner's multiple intelligences framework (Shearer, 2024): the curriculum simultaneously activates linguistic, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential intelligence, producing inclusive, multidimensional learning.

Koentjaraningrat's concept of *enkulturasi* provides the theoretical lens for understanding how values move from communal to individual, from practiced to internalized (Fox, 2024). The school's synthesis of formal structure (curriculum, phased learning outcomes) with informal transmission methods (narration, modeling, experiential engagement) mirrors the most effective indigenous enculturative processes

historically, while introducing the accountability and reproducibility demanded by a modern non-formal educational institution.

Navigating Enabling and Inhibiting Dynamics: Implications for Sustainability

The enabling-inhibiting dynamic presents two structural tensions that Biddle would categorize as role conflicts: the tension between contemporary relevance and traditional fidelity and the tension between community autonomy and resource dependency ([Giorgi et al., 2015](#)). The school's response to digital modernization exemplifies adaptive cultural preservation in action. Rather than adopting a defensive posture, the institution integrates digital tools for cultural documentation and encourages critical dialogue about the contemporary relevance of ancestral values—an approach that is likely to be more sustainable and resonant with younger generations than outright rejection of technology. This stance mirrors the broader finding in the literature that successful Indigenous schools are those that engage with, rather than flee from, modernity ([Fiharsono et al., 2026](#)).

The facilitator regeneration challenge constitutes the school's most acute structural risk. The concentration of irreplaceable knowledge in a small number of advanced-age elders creates a temporal urgency that demands systematic documentation and mentorship programs. The presence of three tutors aged 25–26 in the current teaching body is a promising start, but the pace of regeneration must accelerate substantially. Comparative evidence from Papua ([Wambrauw et al., 2019](#)) confirms that this challenge is systemic across Indonesian indigenous schools, suggesting a need for national-level policy frameworks supporting mentor-apprentice knowledge transfer programs.

The gap between the supportive national regulatory framework and the school's de facto experience of limited local government engagement replicates findings across the Indonesian indigenous education literature. [Teng et al.'s \(2025\)](#) political-economic argument—that community-based education contributes directly to national educational goals and therefore deserves commensurate state investment—provides a robust basis for evidence-based advocacy. In Tana Toraja specifically, the economic argument is particularly compelling: a community possessing living cultural knowledge, not merely museum artifacts, constitutes the most authentic and sustainable resource for the cultural tourism sector that drives the regional economy.

Collectively, long-term institutional sustainability rests on four strategic pillars that must be developed in parallel: (1) structured facilitator regeneration through youth cadre development; (2) systematic and comprehensive documentation of elder knowledge; (3) diversification of operational funding through community enterprise, government partnership, and grant access; and (4) evidence-based advocacy for formal recognition and material support from local and national government actors.

This study contributes theoretically by advancing an ethno-pedagogical framework that synthesises role theory, spatial theory, and adaptive cultural preservation to analyse community-based indigenous education as a simultaneously performative, spatial, and transformative institution. Practically, it provides actionable evidence for indigenous community leaders, education policymakers, and cultural heritage institutions seeking

to design, strengthen, and fund contextually appropriate mechanisms for living cultural preservation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Sipanundu'* Madandan Traditional School operates as a multifunctional cultural education space, fulfilling seven systematically integrated roles that together constitute a holistic ethno-pedagogical model for the preservation and transmission of Torajan local wisdom. Through an experiential, community-rooted pedagogy grounded in the philosophy of *sipanundu'*, the school transmits seven clusters of local wisdom values — from the social ethics of mutual support and solidarity to the ecological philosophy of *Tallulolona* and the literary aesthetics of *Kada disedan sarong* — producing measurable and multi-dimensional changes in learner behaviour, identity, and cultural consciousness.

The school's effectiveness is enabled by strong community ownership, the active engagement of elder knowledge-holders, and a contextually responsive experiential methodology. Its sustainability is threatened by the structural challenges of digital cultural competition, facilitator regeneration urgency, funding precarity, and insufficient institutional recognition from local government. The school's adaptive response to these challenges — integrating technology, developing young facilitators, and building economic self-sufficiency through indigenous enterprise — offers a replicable model of adaptive cultural preservation for indigenous communities across Indonesia and beyond.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess the durability of value internalisation over time, comparative multi-site studies across Torajan and other Indonesian indigenous school contexts, and mixed-method approaches that quantify behavioural and attitudinal outcomes alongside qualitative depth. Studies examining the integration of digital platforms as complementary documentation and outreach tools within indigenous education systems would also make a timely contribution.

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