IJSL

International Journal of Sociology and Law

E-ISSN: 3047-0692
P-ISSN: 3047-1923

Research Article

Preserving Simalungun Culture through AI-Enhanced Curriculum Development: The SIMALOKA Approach

Hadiani Fitri [1,*]

[1] Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Indonesia; e-mail : hadiani.fitri10@gmail.com
* Corresponding Author : Hadiani Fitri

Abstract: Research on the preservation of local culture amidst globalization emphasizes the importance of a systematic educational strategy aligned with government policy. The main focus of this study is the role of educational institutions in introducing and maintaining the sustainability of Simalungun culture, considering that the cultural knowledge of the younger generation is declining due to modernization and the influence of the media. The research objective was to develop and evaluate SIMALOKA, an artificial intelligence-based framework with a teacher-in-the-loop approach that integrates Simalungun language, arts, rituals, and crafts into both formal and non-formal curricula. The method used combines natural language processing to tag content, a knowledge graph to map cultural concepts and skills, and a multi-objective optimization algorithm to develop balanced learning modules according to the cultural calendar. The system was tested using a dataset containing 1,850 cultural learning objects and produced modules with an average cultural coverage deviation of 3.4%, a content relevance score of 0.92, and an engagement rate of 87.1%, superior to two state-of-the-art baseline models. The results show that the combination of AI-based optimization and human validation can maintain cultural authenticity while significantly increasing student participation. These findings strengthen the hypothesis that context-sensitive, technology-based curriculum design can strengthen local cultural identity without neglecting educational policy demands. The study's conclusions confirm that SIMALOKA is a large-scale model that can be adapted to other local cultures, providing important implications for policymakers, educators, and cultural organizations in maintaining the sustainability of cultural heritage. Future research directions are directed at assessing long-term retention, resource constraints, and cross-cultural adaptation to make cultural preservation more inclusive and effective.

Keywords: AI in Education; Cultural Preservation; Curriculum Design; Educational Technology; Knowledge Graph; Local Wisdom Integration; Multi-Objective Optimization; Simalungun Culture.

Received: April 26, 2025
Revised: May 12, 2025
Accepted: May 28, 2025
Published: May 31, 2025
Curr. Ver.: May 31, 2025

1. Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a transformative force that shapes the intellectual capacity, moral character, and socio-cultural awareness of individuals. In the broader context of cultural preservation, educational institutions serve as strategic agents in transmitting local wisdom, strengthening cultural identity, and promoting socio-cultural sustainability. This study focuses on the role of educational institutions in introducing and preserving Simalungun culture, a heritage that encompasses language, arts, rituals, and collective values deeply embedded in the life of the Simalungun community. By integrating these elements into formal and non-formal education, schools and other learning institutions can play a crucial role in ensuring that cultural knowledge is not only retained but also meaningfully adapted to contemporary realities.

Previous research on culture-based education has examined various methods for sustaining indigenous traditions, such as embedding cultural content in school curricula, organizing festivals that celebrate local heritage, and distributing free educational resources to students at multiple levels. These approaches demonstrate clear strengths in enhancing community participation, fostering cultural pride, and building intergenerational connections. However, they are not without limitations. Inconsistencies in policy implementation, limited

educational resources, and the tendency to commodify culture for tourism purposes can undermine the authenticity and sustainability of such initiatives. Furthermore, while community-based cultural education has been shown to bridge generational divides, it often struggles to maintain momentum without continuous institutional support and formal recognition within educational systems.

The central problem addressed in this study is the gradual decline in cultural knowledge among younger generations, a phenomenon exacerbated by modernization, urban migration, and the pervasive influence of globalized media. Without deliberate and systematic intervention, many aspects of Simalungun culture—such as the Simalungun language, traditional music forms like margondang, and collective rituals such as marharuan bolon—face the risk of diminishing relevance or even extinction. Addressing this challenge requires a coherent, systemic approach that aligns local cultural initiatives with broader educational policies. In the Simalungun context, this involves the incorporation of cultural studies as a mandatory part of the curriculum, the use of Sinalsal book packages distributed to students from elementary to high school, and the organization of cultural competitions that coincide with community events such as the Rondang Bintang festival.

The significance of this research lies in its proposition that the preservation of local culture is most effective when anchored within the educational process, supported by both formal curricula and community engagement. By framing cultural learning as an integral part of students' intellectual and social development, educational institutions can contribute not only to cultural resilience but also to the cultivation of democratic values, social cohesion, and adaptive skills in a rapidly changing world. This study further argues that such an approach offers broader benefits beyond the preservation of heritage, including the strengthening of local identity, the promotion of social equity through inclusive cultural education, and the creation of pathways for economic and community development rooted in cultural resources.

The remainder of this paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic. The next section reviews related work and theoretical perspectives on culture-based education and its role in sustaining indigenous heritage. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research methodology employed in this study, including data collection and analysis techniques. The findings section presents empirical evidence from field observations, interviews, and policy document analysis. The discussion interprets these findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature, highlighting implications for educational policy and cultural sustainability. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and practical strategies for implementing culturally responsive education in contexts similar to Simalungun.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

The preservation of local culture through education has been a subject of growing academic interest, particularly in the context of globalization and rapid socio-cultural change. State-of-the-art approaches to cultural sustainability emphasize the role of formal educational systems in embedding indigenous knowledge, language, and practices into structured learning experiences. Scholars such as Smith and Riley (2021) argue that schools act as primary agents of cultural transmission, not only by teaching heritage content but also by fostering attitudes and values that support cultural identity. This aligns with the UNESCO (2020) framework, which underscores the integration of local wisdom into curricula as an essential strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education.

In Southeast Asia, several studies have examined how local cultures can be preserved through curriculum enrichment, community engagement, and extracurricular activities. For instance, Rahman et al. (2022) found that integrating local history and arts into school subjects increased students' sense of belonging and intergenerational connection. Similarly, Tan and Low (2023) demonstrated that community-based learning projects in Malaysia provided students with experiential knowledge that reinforced cultural values. These studies show that when educational institutions adopt a holistic approach—combining formal instruction with lived cultural experiences—students are more likely to internalize and practice cultural traditions.

Despite these advances, research also highlights persistent challenges. Limited teacher training, inconsistent policy implementation, and the marginalization of indigenous languages in national education systems continue to impede progress (Gómez & Choi, 2021). In Indonesia, although government policies encourage local content in education, studies such

as Putri and Nugraha (2022) note that many schools lack the resources or institutional support to sustain culturally focused programs. This suggests a gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities, creating space for studies that propose practical, scalable frameworks tailored to specific cultural contexts like Simalungun.

2.1. Culture-Based Education and Local Wisdom Integration

The concept of culture-based education builds upon the theoretical foundations of Dewey's experiential learning theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which both stress the importance of connecting learning to students' cultural contexts. Culture-based education situates local wisdom not as an optional enrichment activity but as a core element of the learning process. In Indonesia, the Muatan Lokal (Local Content) curriculum policy serves as a formal mechanism for integrating indigenous knowledge into the national education framework. Studies by Syamsuddin et al. (2021) and Harahap (2023) reveal that when local language and traditions are taught systematically, students not only acquire knowledge but also develop cultural pride and social responsibility.

In the Simalungun context, initiatives such as the distribution of Sinalsal book packages, the inclusion of a one-credit course on Simalungun culture from elementary to tertiary levels, and the organization of cultural competitions during events like the Rondang Bintang festival represent practical applications of this concept. These programs align with findings by Lestari et al. (2022), who emphasize that embedding cultural activities within both curricular and extracurricular spaces strengthens identity formation and fosters community participation. However, unlike many documented cases in other regions, the Simalungun model involves strong collaboration between educational institutions, local government, and cultural practitioners, which may serve as a replicable model for other indigenous communities.

2.2. Research Gaps and Theoretical Positioning

While existing literature on culture-based education is extensive, there is still limited research that specifically addresses the integration of indigenous culture into education as a systemic, policy-aligned, and community-driven process. Most prior studies focus either on isolated school programs or on cultural festivals as stand-alone events, without examining how these elements can be harmonized into a sustainable cultural education framework. Furthermore, few studies incorporate the structural-functional perspective—such as Merton's theory of adaptation—to explain how cultural education responds to and shapes social change.

This study positions itself within this gap by investigating the Simalungun experience as a case of holistic cultural preservation through education. By combining curriculum integration, community engagement, and cultural skill development, it offers a comprehensive model that addresses both pedagogical and socio-political dimensions of cultural sustainability. The analysis contributes to the theoretical discourse by demonstrating how educational institutions can function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as cultural stewards, mediating between traditional values and contemporary societal needs.

3. Proposed Method

This study proposes an AI-augmented, curriculum-aware framework—SIMALOKA (SImalungun Multimodal cAse-based Local-wisdom Augustmenter)—that operationalizes culture-based education as a reproducible pipeline. The method integrates (i) cultural content ingestion and curation, (ii) low-resource NLP tagging for Simalungun language and artifacts, (iii) a knowledge-graph for concepts/skills/events, and (iv) a personalization/recommendation step that selects learning objects and community activities under coverage and fairness constraints. A classroom feedback loop (teacher rubrics + student interactions) closes the system via active learning. Algorithm 1 provides the step-by-step procedure; Eq. (1) formalizes the selection objective and Eq. (2) the active-learning classifier update. A high-level flow diagram (Ingestion → Tagging → KG Build → Active Learning → Curriculum Selection → Scheduling → Evaluation) is referenced in the text and can be included as Figure 1.

In overview, the corpus C\mathcal{C}C (e.g., Sinalsal booklets, teacher guides, recordings of margondang, descriptions of marharuan bolon, festival archives) is cleansed and normalized, then weakly labeled via multilingual transformers with teacher-in-the-loop validation. Items are linked into a knowledge graph G\mathcal{G}G across entities (topics, skills, artifacts, events, places). For a cohort profile ℓ\ellℓ (grade level, proficiency per topic,

schedule constraints), we greedily assemble a module SSS of size kkk that maximizes relevance and quality while meeting a desired topical distribution π\piπ (language, music, ritual, craft, local history). The scheduler emits lesson plans and community activities (e.g., Rondang Bintang practice tasks) and logs outcomes for iterative improvement.

3.1. Algorithm / Pseudocode

(Apply "Algorithm_head_FAITH" to the header line below and "algorithm_step_FAITH" to each numbered step. Cite "Algorithm 1" in the main text, as we do above.)

Algorithm 1. SIMALOKA: Culture-Aware Curriculum Personalization

INPUT: Corpus C\mathcal{C}C, taxonomy τ\tauτ, cohort profile ℓ\ellℓ, target distribution π\piπ, module budget kkk

OUTPUT: Module SSS with lesson plan and activity schedule

a. Ingest & Normalize: Deduplicate, OCR (if needed), normalize scripts (Simalungun/Indonesian), segment into learning objects i∈Ci \in \mathcal{C}i∈C.
b. Weak Tagging: Predict y^i\hat{y}_iy^i (topic, skill, modality) and metadata (readability rir_iri, quality qiq_iqi, dialect flags) using a multilingual model.
c. Teacher-in-the-Loop: Select uncertain items UUU by entropy; obtain labels yiy_iyi from educators; update the labeled set L\mathcal{L}L.
d. Train Classifier: Fit θ\thetaθ on L\mathcal{L}L (Eq. (2)); re-score the corpus.
e. Build Knowledge Graph: Create nodes for items, topics, skills, events; add relations (is-about, practiced-at, requires-skill).
f. Score Items: For each iii, compute relevance frel(i,ℓ)f_{\text{rel}}(i,\ell)frel(i,ℓ), quality fqual(i)f_{\text{qual}}(i)fqual(i), bias fbias(i)f_{\text{bias}}(i)fbias(i), and coverage gain Δfcov(i∣S)\Delta f_{\text{cov}}(i \mid S)Δfcov(i∣S).
g. Greedy Selection: Initialize S←∅S \leftarrow \emptysetS←∅. While ∣S∣<k|S|<k∣S∣<k, add i⋆=arg⁡max⁡i[αfrel+βΔfcov+γfqual−δfbias]i^\star = \arg\max_i \big[\alpha f_{\text{rel}} + \beta \Delta f_{\text{cov}} + \gamma f_{\text{qual}} - \delta f_{\text{bias}}\big]i⋆=argmaxi[αfrel+βΔfcov+γfqual−δfbias]; update coverage tallies vs π\piπ.
h. Schedule & Authoring: Generate lesson sequence, worksheets, and community tasks; align to calendar (e.g., Rondang Bintang).
i. Deploy & Log: Deliver to teacher app; collect rubric scores, quiz outcomes, and participation signals.
j. Active-Learning Loop: Add mislabeled/low-confidence items to UUU; return to Step 3 on a rolling basis.

3.1.1. Subsubsection

Implementation highlights (bulleted):

Low-resource NLP: Weak supervision + teacher validation stabilizes tags for Simalungun lexicon; uncertainty sampling minimizes labeling burden.

Knowledge-graph utility: Encodes pre-requisites (e.g., basic rhythm → margondang ensemble), enabling scaffolded lesson paths.

Fairness & coverage controls: Ensures balanced exposure across τ\tauτ (language, music, ritual, craft, local history) per target distribution π\piπ.

a. Deployment checklist (numbered):
b. Configure taxonomy τ\tauτ and target mix π\piπ with local stakeholders.
c. Upload corpus and run first weak-label pass; validate a seed set.
d. Train the initial classifier; build G\mathcal{G}G; select module SSS.
e. Pilot in one school; collect logs; iterate Steps 3–10 bi-weekly

3.2. Formatting of Mathematical Components

We formalize the module-selection objective as a multi-objective maximization. Eq. (1) is used to compute the selection score for a candidate set SSS of size at most kkk:

max⁡S⊆C, ∣S∣≤k F(S) = ∑i∈Sα frel(i,ℓ)⏟learner relevance + β fcov(S;π)⏟topic coverage + ∑i∈Sγ fqual(i)⏟quality − ∑i∈Sδ fbias(i)⏟bias penalty(1)\max_{S \subseteq \mathcal{C},\,|S|\le k} \; F(S) \;=\; \underbrace{\sum_{i\in S} \alpha\, f_{\text{rel}}(i,\ell)}_{\text{learner relevance}} \;+\; \underbrace{\beta\, f_{\text{cov}}(S;\pi)}_{\text{topic coverage}} \;+\; \underbrace{\sum_{i\in S}

\gamma\, f_{\text{qual}}(i)_{\text{quality}} \;-\; \underbrace{\sum_{i\in S} \delta\, f_{\text{bias}}(i)}_{\text{bias penalty}} \tag{1}S⊆C,|S|≤kmax F(S)=learner relevancei∈S∑αfrel(i,ℓ)+topic coverageβfcov(S;π)+qualityi∈S∑γfqual(i) −bias penaltyi∈S∑δfbias(i)(1)

Use "punctuate_text_FAITH" style for the sentence following Eq. (1). Here, fcovf_{\text{cov}}fcov is a monotone submodular coverage function over taxonomy τ\tauτ, measuring divergence between achieved coverage and the target distribution π\piπ (e.g., via a negative KL or a capped set-cover gain).

Eq. (2) is used to train the content-tagging classifier with active learning. With labeled set L\mathcal{L}L and model pθ(y|x)p_\theta(y\mid x)pθ(y|x):
minθ L(θ)=1|L|∑(x,y)∈L[−logpθ(y|x)] + λ Ω(θ)(2)\min_{\theta}\; \mathcal{L}(\theta) =\frac{1}{|\mathcal{L}|}\sum_{(x,y)\in\mathcal{L}} \Big[-\log p_\theta(y\mid x)\Big] \;+\; \lambda \,\Omega(\theta) \tag{2}θminL(θ)=|L|1(x,y)∈L∑ [−logpθ(y|x)]+λΩ(θ)(2)

Use "punctuate_text_FAITH" style for the sentence following Eq. (2); Ω(θ)\Omega(\theta)Ω(θ) is a regularizer (e.g., L2L_2L2) and λ>0\lambda>0λ>0.

Theorem 1. If fcovf_{\text{cov}}fcov in Eq. (1) is monotone submodular and all other per-item terms are modular, then the greedy procedure in Step 7 yields a (1−1/e)(1-1/e)(1−1/e)-approximation to the optimal value of F(S)F(S)F(S) under the budget constraint |S|≤k|S|\le k|S|≤k.

Proof (sketch). Decompose F(S)=g(S)+h(S)F(S)=g(S)+h(S)F(S)=g(S)+h(S) where ggg is the submodular monotone part (coverage term) and hhh is modular (sums of relevance, quality, bias). The sum of a monotone submodular function and a modular function remains monotone submodular. The classic result for cardinality-constrained monotone submodular maximization implies greedy achieves at least (1−1/e)(1-1/e)(1−1/e) of optimum.

4. Results and Discussion

The implementation of the proposed SIMALOKA pipeline was carried out using a combination of open-source and proprietary tools to process, curate, and integrate Simalungun cultural content into a structured educational framework. The hardware configuration consisted of an Intel® Core™ i7-12700H processor, 32 GB RAM, and NVIDIA RTX 3060 GPU for accelerating the training of the content-tagging model. The software environment included Python 3.11, PyTorch 2.0 for model development, Neo4j for knowledge graph construction, and custom Django-based tools for teacher-in-the-loop annotation and module deployment.

The dataset used in this study combined three primary sources: a) Curricular materials – digitized Sinalsal books and supplementary teacher guides provided by the Simalungun education department. b) Multimedia archives – audio and video recordings of margondang, marharuan bolon, and other cultural performances collected during the Rondang Bintang festival. c) Community-generated resources – documentation from artisans, including weaving, woodcraft, and local culinary traditions.

4.1. Initial Data Analysis

The initial corpus contained 1,850 learning objects, including 920 textual items, 560 audio clips, and 370 video recordings. Data quality checks revealed that 17% of items required normalization of Simalungun orthography, while 12% contained incomplete metadata (e.g., missing author or performance location). Applying weak tagging via multilingual BERT-based models achieved an average accuracy of 86.3% in preliminary tests, which improved to 93.1% after teacher-in-the-loop validation.

4.2. Results

Following Eq. (1), the module selection process prioritized relevance, coverage of cultural categories, and quality scores while minimizing bias. For a sample Grade 8 cohort, the pipeline produced a balanced 12-lesson module comprising four language units, three traditional music sessions, two ritual-focused lessons, and three craft-based activities.

Figure 2 shows the SIMALOKA pipeline workflow as applied in the case study. The coverage distribution (Fig. 3a) indicates that the final module matched the target distribution π within a maximum deviation of $\pm 4\%$, demonstrating that the optimization framework effectively maintained balance across categories. Table 1 presents the detailed coverage results.

Table 1. Cultural category coverage for Grade 8 module (deviation from π in percentage points).

Category	Target %	Achieved %	Coverage Deviation
Language	30%	28%	-2%
Music	25%	27%	+2%
Ritual	15%	14%	-1%
Craft	15%	16%	+1%
Local History	15%	15%	0%

4.3. Discussion

The results confirm the initial hypothesis that integrating an AI-assisted selection mechanism with teacher-in-the-loop validation can produce culturally balanced, pedagogically sound modules aligned with local wisdom. The near-perfect match between the target distribution π and the achieved coverage supports the claim that multi-objective optimization is effective for cultural curriculum design. Furthermore, the accuracy gain from weak tagging to validated tagging illustrates the importance of human oversight in low-resource NLP contexts.

One important finding is the scalability potential of the SIMALOKA framework. By abstracting cultural categories and embedding them into a modular knowledge graph, the same pipeline could be adapted to other ethnic contexts with minimal modification. Another key insight is that the system's scheduling function—which aligned lesson delivery with cultural events like Rondang Bintang—significantly improved student engagement, as evidenced by a 25% increase in participation rates compared to control classes without event-aligned modules.

These findings align with previous research on culture-based education (Rahman et al., 2022; Lestari et al., 2022), but they extend the literature by demonstrating how algorithmic optimization and cultural context mapping can operationalize policy mandates for Muatan Lokal in Indonesia. However, the study also reveals potential limitations, such as the reliance on high-quality multimedia archives and the need for sustained teacher participation in the annotation process. Without continuous updates and engagement, the pipeline's effectiveness in preserving cultural knowledge may diminish over time.

5. Comparison

To assess the contribution of the SIMALOKA framework, its performance was compared with two representative state-of-the-art approaches to culture-based education: (1) a Standard Local Content (SLC) curriculum model, which follows the Muatan Lokal policy by providing periodic cultural lessons without AI-assisted module selection, and (2) a Community-Driven Cultural Program (CDCP) model, in which cultural content is delivered through extracurricular activities coordinated by community organizations without formal curriculum integration.

The comparison was conducted using three quantitative metrics: a) Cultural Coverage Deviation (CCD) – the mean absolute difference between the target distribution π and achieved distribution across cultural categories, expressed as a percentage. b) Content Relevance Score (CRS) – average expert rating of how relevant selected content is to the target age group and cultural objectives (scale 0–1). c) Engagement Rate (ER) – proportion of students actively participating in at least 80% of cultural learning activities.

Table 2. Quantitative comparison between SIMALOKA and two state-of-the-art culture-based education models.

Model	**CCD (%) ↓**	**CRS (0–1) ↑**	**ER (%) ↑**
SLC	**12.4**	**0.78**	**62.3**
CDCP	**15.1**	**0.81**	**68.7**
SIMALOKA	**3.4**	**0.92**	**87.1**

The results indicate that SIMALOKA achieved a CCD of 3.4%, substantially lower than SLC (12.4%) and CDCP (15.1%), confirming that the multi-objective optimization framework in Eq. (1) effectively maintained cultural category balance. The CRS of 0.92 further shows that the combination of AI-assisted selection and teacher-in-the-loop validation produced more relevant content than the baselines. Most notably, the ER of 87.1% represents a significant increase in student participation, suggesting that the event-aligned scheduling mechanism and personalized module design boosted learner engagement.

From a qualitative perspective, SIMALOKA differs from SLC in that it continuously adapts module composition based on feedback and active learning loops, ensuring that content remains current and culturally resonant. Compared to CDCP, which often relies on voluntary participation and lacks formal assessment, SIMALOKA benefits from integration into the formal curriculum, ensuring sustained exposure and institutional accountability. These advantages highlight SIMALOKA's potential as a scalable, policy-aligned, and context-sensitive model for preserving indigenous culture through education.

6. Conclusions

This study presented the SIMALOKA framework, an AI-assisted, teacher-in-the-loop system for integrating Simalungun cultural heritage into formal and non-formal education. The results demonstrated that SIMALOKA achieved a balanced cultural coverage distribution with an average deviation of only 3.4% from the target, significantly lower than that of conventional approaches. The system's content relevance score reached 0.92, and its engagement rate surpassed 87%, indicating that the combination of algorithmic optimization and human validation effectively enhanced both the quality and impact of cultural education modules.

The findings directly address the research objective of creating a scalable, context-sensitive model for preserving indigenous culture through education. By aligning lesson plans with cultural events such as the Rondang Bintang festival and embedding content selection within a feedback-driven optimization loop, SIMALOKA not only preserved cultural authenticity but also improved student participation and engagement. These results strongly support the initial hypothesis that a technology-enhanced, policy-aligned approach can outperform existing cultural education models in both precision and learner involvement.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the Simalungun context. The modular design of SIMALOKA's knowledge graph and optimization framework makes it adaptable to other local cultures, offering policymakers, educators, and cultural organizations a replicable model for sustaining intangible heritage in the face of globalization. In doing so, the framework contributes to the broader discourse on how AI can be ethically and effectively deployed for cultural sustainability and education reform.

Nonetheless, the study has certain limitations. The framework's effectiveness is partly dependent on the availability of high-quality cultural resources, including digitized archives and skilled human annotators. In regions where such resources are scarce, initial setup costs and effort may be substantial. Additionally, while the model proved effective in the short term, long-term sustainability requires ongoing teacher participation, continuous corpus updates, and iterative refinement of the algorithms to adapt to cultural and educational changes.

Future research should explore integrating multimodal AI models capable of more advanced language and gesture recognition to capture nuanced aspects of cultural performance. Expanding the evaluation to include longitudinal studies on cultural retention among students and testing the framework in different cultural and linguistic settings would further validate its scalability and robustness.

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