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Reinterpreting Sasak Tuselak Mystical Heritage into Indigenous Pedagogy for Culturally Responsive Education

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Abstract

Indigenous knowledge is increasingly recognized as a resource for culturally responsive education, yet traditions that carry mystical or supernatural associations are still commonly dismissed as folklore or superstition rather than treated as sources of pedagogical value. This study examines how *Tuselak*, a contested mystical tradition of the Sasak people of Lombok, Indonesia, is culturally and pedagogically reinterpreted, and how its educational relevance is perceived by prospective teachers. A convergent mixed-methods design combined semi-structured interviews with nine cultural custodians, document analysis, and a questionnaire administered to 167 undergraduate Social Studies Education students. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically; quantitative data were analyzed descriptively; and both strands were integrated through a joint display. Cultural custodians described Tuselak as having been reinterpreted from a narrative of literal supernatural danger into a moral framework emphasizing responsibility, humility, self-control, religious awareness, and communal solidarity. Students, in turn, recognized the cultural value, critical-thinking potential, and moral relevance of Tuselak, yet expressed marked caution toward its formal integration into classroom instruction, favoring discussion-based and inquiry-oriented approaches over direct curricular inclusion. This convergence-with-tension between custodian and student perspectives is synthesized into the Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework (TCPF), a four-component model explaining how contested cultural heritage can be treated critically within contemporary education. The study contributes to scholarship on indigenous knowledge systems, cultural pedagogy, and culturally responsive education by demonstrating that reinterpretation, rather than preservation or rejection, offers a viable pathway for engaging contested heritage in formal learning.

1 Introduction

Indigenous knowledge increasingly enters educational discourse as a legitimate resource for contextual learning, cultural literacy, and ethical formation [1–3]. Yet knowledge associated with spirituality, mythology, supernatural belief, or otherwise contested cultural practices poses a more complex pedagogical problem than knowledge domains such as traditional ecological practice, agriculture, or craft: not all cultural knowledge is equally straightforward to bring into a classroom. Traditions that involve supernatural claims, religious tension, or social fear raise questions that indigenous ecological or agrarian knowledge rarely does — questions about how educators can engage such material critically without either dismissing it as superstition or presenting it as literal truth.

Scholarship on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) has progressively shifted from treating local knowledge as an object of preservation toward recognizing it as a source of contextual learning, cultural identity formation, cultural literacy, ethical education, and culturally responsive pedagogy [4–6]. Indigenous knowledge is increasingly understood as relational, culturally situated, and intergenerational — a system that is continuously reinterpreted rather than frozen in its original form [5, 6]. This reframing invites a further question: how should education respond to indigenous knowledge that is not merely unfamiliar to formal schooling, but actively contested within the community itself?

Mystical or contested heritage occupies a distinctive position within this discourse. Unlike ecological knowledge or craft traditions, narratives involving supernatural belief intersect simultaneously with religious interpretation, morality, social fear, and collective memory. Communities themselves often disagree about how such narratives should be understood — as literal spiritual danger, as moral allegory, or as historical artifact. This conceptual complexity means that mystical heritage cannot simply be assimilated into existing models of heritage-based or place-based learning; it requires an approach capable of holding multiple, sometimes competing, interpretations at once.

Tuselak (also referred to locally as *Selaq*) is one such tradition among the Sasak people of Lombok, Indonesia. Popularly associated with supernatural abilities obtained through spiritually prohibited practices, Tuselak has historically evoked fear, moral warning, and religious anxiety within Sasak communities. At the same time, oral narratives about Tuselak carry symbolic meanings related to responsibility, humility, social harmony, self-control, and religious awareness, transmitted informally through storytelling and everyday moral advice. Tuselak therefore offers a conceptually rich case for examining how a tradition entangled with religion, fear, and collective memory can be engaged critically within contemporary education, rather than simply preserved or dismissed.

Existing scholarship on Tuselak has been concentrated in anthropological documentation, folklore studies, religious commentary, and historical or ethnographic description [16, 17, 20–22]. While such work has substantially enriched understanding of Sasak cultural heritage, it has rarely examined Tuselak as a pedagogical phenomenon — that is, as a resource through which moral values, social norms, and cultural identity are transmitted and reinterpreted across generations. This leaves three interrelated gaps. An **empirical gap** exists because little evidence brings cultural custodians and contemporary university students into the same analytic frame to compare how each group understands the educational meaning of Tuselak. A **theoretical gap** exists because mystical or contested heritage is rarely read through cultural pedagogy and Indigenous Knowledge Systems rather than through anthropological or theological lenses alone. An **educational gap** exists because no model currently explains how heritage of this kind can be treated critically — neither romanticized nor dismissed — within formal education.

1.1. Research Questions

This study addresses these gaps by examining how Tuselak is reinterpreted culturally and pedagogically, and how its educational relevance is perceived by prospective Social Studies teachers. Using a convergent mixed-methods design that integrates qualitative evidence from cultural custodians with quantitative evidence from undergraduate students, the study is guided by three research questions: (1) How do cultural custodians describe the historical, moral, and pedagogical transformation of Tuselak? (2) How do Social Studies Education students perceive the relevance, educational benefits, and risks of integrating Tuselak into formal learning? (3) How do these two sources of evidence, read together, explain the transformation of Tuselak into a resource for indigenous cultural pedagogy? Theoretically, the study contributes a framework for understanding how contested mystical heritage can be

reinterpreted as cultural pedagogy. Practically, it offers guidance for teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators seeking to engage contested local knowledge critically rather than either uncritically or not at all.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Pedagogy and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Contemporary educational scholarship increasingly treats learning as inseparable from the cultural contexts in which knowledge is created and transmitted, rather than confined to formal cognitive instruction. This premise underlies cultural pedagogy, an approach that recognizes local knowledge, indigenous tradition, and community practice as legitimate sources of learning [1–4]. Pedagogy, in this view, is a cultural practice in which power, identity, and knowledge interact through storytelling, ritual, oral tradition, and everyday social interaction, not only through classroom instruction [11, 12].

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide the epistemological foundation for this approach. Rather than static bodies of belief, IKS are relational, culturally situated, and dynamically reinterpreted, integrating spirituality, ethics, environmental understanding, and social responsibility within a single epistemological frame [5, 6]. Recent research demonstrates that legitimizing IKS within education contributes to both educational equity and cultural sustainability by connecting local wisdom with contemporary educational challenges [8, 9]. This body of work provides the analytical vocabulary this study uses to interpret Tuselak: not as an object whose supernatural claims require verification, but as a knowledge system whose pedagogical functions can be examined empirically.

2.2 Mystical or Contested Heritage as Cultural Knowledge

Mystical narratives — accounts of supernatural beings, extraordinary abilities, or sacred danger — have long served indigenous communities as instruments for communicating moral expectations and reinforcing social norms [16–18]. Rather than treating such narratives as either empirically true or simply false, this study follows scholarship suggesting that mystical narratives *may perform* moral, social-regulatory, identity-forming, and mnemonic functions depending on cultural context [16, 18]; whether they do so, and how, is an empirical question to be examined in the data rather than assumed in advance. This distinction matters: this review does not claim that mystical traditions are inherently educational systems, since that would substitute a theoretical assumption for the empirical work the present study undertakes.

Anthropological accounts of ritual and symbolic meaning further suggest that narratives of extraordinary or dangerous power often encode lessons about humility, justice, responsibility, and respect for communal authority, independent of whether the supernatural claims themselves are accepted as literal [16–18]. Applied to Tuselak, this literature raises the empirical question this study investigates: does the tradition, as understood by contemporary cultural custodians and students, function in comparable ways — and if so, through what specific narrative and pedagogical mechanisms?

2.3 Indigenous Knowledge in Contemporary Education

A growing body of research connects indigenous and heritage-based knowledge to culturally responsive teaching, place-based learning, inquiry pedagogy, cultural literacy, critical thinking, and character education [3, 4, 10]. Social Studies education is one domain in which this connection has been extensively explored, since it aims to develop learners' understanding of cultural diversity, civic responsibility, and democratic participation through engagement with authentic cultural material [3, 10]. However, the broader relevance of this literature extends beyond any single disciplinary domain: indigenous and heritage education, teacher education, curriculum studies, and multicultural education all share an interest in how contested or unfamiliar cultural knowledge can be transformed into legitimate learning resources without being reduced to decoration or doctrine. This study situates Tuselak within that wider conversation, using Social Studies Education as the empirical setting in which the transformation is examined.

3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by three theoretical perspectives rather than by a pre-existing model of Tuselak pedagogy. Using general theory to interpret data, and reserving the construction of a tradition-specific framework for the Discussion, keeps the empirical findings — rather than a prior assumption about what Tuselak *should* mean pedagogically — as the basis for the framework ultimately proposed in Section 6.4.

3.1 Cultural Pedagogy

Cultural pedagogy serves as the primary analytical lens, treating Tuselak neither as a supernatural claim requiring verification nor as a purely anthropological artifact, but as a socially constructed educational resource through which communities transmit ethical principles, cultural identity, and collective responsibility [1, 11, 12].

3.2 Indigenous Knowledge Systems

IKS provides the conceptual vocabulary for understanding how Tuselak-related knowledge is held, transmitted, and revised across generations — as a relational and dynamic system embedded in oral tradition, kinship, and community life rather than as a fixed inventory of beliefs [5, 6, 13].

3.3 Culturally Responsive Education

Culturally responsive education explains the conditions under which cultural knowledge such as Tuselak can be transformed into a legitimate learning resource: it must be engaged critically, situated within students' own cultural frame of reference, and mediated by pedagogical judgment rather than uncritical affirmation [3, 10, 23]. This principle — that cultural relevance alone is not sufficient without critical mediation — is returned to directly in the Discussion.

Educational domains such as Social Studies, heritage education, and character education are treated in this study as *applications* of these three theoretical perspectives rather than as additional theories in their own right.

4 Methods

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a **convergent mixed-methods design** [27, 28], in which qualitative and quantitative strands were collected during overlapping fieldwork periods, analyzed independently using strand-appropriate procedures, and integrated only at the interpretation stage. Qualitative interviews with cultural custodians and the quantitative student questionnaire were treated as data sources of comparable analytic weight (QUAL + quan, with roughly equal emphasis on breadth of interpretation), rather than one strand serving merely to illustrate the other. Integration was conducted through a joint display (Section 4.5; Table 4) that classified the relationship between qualitative themes and quantitative results as convergent, complementary, or divergent, and meta-inferences were drawn from patterns observed across this comparison rather than from either strand alone.

4.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, where Tuselak continues to circulate as part of Sasak cultural memory. Data collection spanned several districts to capture varied community experiences and interpretations.

Qualitative participants were selected through **purposive sampling**. Nine cultural custodians participated, including cultural elders, traditional leaders, a local historian, a religious leader, and a traditional healer (*beliyan*), selected on the basis of (1) demonstrated knowledge of Tuselak, (2) active involvement in community or cultural life, and (3) voluntary willingness to participate. These nine informants are described in this study as *participants* or *interviewed cultural custodians*; they are not presented as representative of Sasak society as a whole.

The quantitative component involved **167 undergraduate students** enrolled in the Social Studies Education Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, drawn from all five regencies and the one municipality of Lombok Island through purposive sampling, on the basis that participants had completed coursework related to local culture and were positioned to evaluate the educational relevance of indigenous heritage critically. These students are referred to throughout as *students in this study* or *respondents*, and their views are not generalized to Sasak youth as a whole. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics and data sources.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics and Data Sources

Group	Composition	n	Primary data source
Cultural custodians	Cultural elders, traditional leaders, historian, religious leader, traditional healer (*beliyan*)	9	Semi-structured interviews, observation notes
Undergraduate students	Social Studies Education students, all five regencies and one municipality of Lombok	167	Structured questionnaire
Documentary sources	Historical records, prior scholarly publications, community/cultural archives relevant to Tuselak	—	Document analysis

4.3 Data Collection

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the nine cultural custodians in Indonesian and, where appropriate, the Sasak language, and were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Sasak-language material was translated into Indonesian and subsequently into English for reporting purposes by the research team; back-translation or independent verification of the translation was not formally undertaken, which is acknowledged as a limitation (Section 8). Interview questions addressed the historical development of Tuselak, cultural beliefs, educational values, social functions, and contemporary transformation of the tradition.

Observation. Field observation supplemented interview data by documenting community narratives, everyday references to Tuselak, and related social practices as they arose during fieldwork visits, recorded through descriptive field notes rather than sustained ethnographic immersion. Observation is therefore reported here as a supplementary source of contextual data rather than as a full ethnographic method.

Document analysis. Documentary sources — including prior scholarly and historical accounts of Tuselak and related Sasak cultural material, and, where available, community records — were analyzed to strengthen contextual understanding and support triangulation with interview data.

4.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke [26]: familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and interpretation within the study's theoretical framework (Section 3). Coding was conducted by the research team; constant comparison was used across participants' narratives to check emerging themes, and interpretive decisions were discussed jointly by the authors as a form of analytic reflexivity.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics only — frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations — to summarize response patterns on the questionnaire. No inferential

statistical tests were conducted, and the quantitative findings are reported strictly as *perceptions* rather than as evidence of actual learning outcomes or effects (see Section 5.3).

Questionnaire. The questionnaire measured students' perceptions across four dimensions: familiarity with Tuselak, perceived educational value, perceived relevance to Social Studies learning, and perceived contribution to cultural preservation, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) supplemented by items on preferred instructional approaches and perceived concerns. The instrument was reviewed by experts in Social Studies education and indigenous culture for content validity and piloted prior to full administration to check item clarity. Formal reliability statistics (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not computed for the final instrument; this is acknowledged as a limitation (Section 8), and no reliability coefficient is reported here that was not actually calculated.

4.6 Mixed-Methods Integration

Following separate analysis of each strand, qualitative themes and quantitative results were compared directly and classified as **convergent** (both strands pointing to the same interpretation), **complementary** (each strand contributing a distinct but compatible piece of the picture), or in **tension** (the two strands pointing toward different emphases or concerns). This classification is presented as a joint display in Table 4 (Section 5.4) and forms the empirical basis from which the Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework is subsequently developed in Section 6.4.

4.7 Trustworthiness

Credibility was supported through data triangulation across interviews, observation notes, and documentary sources, methodological triangulation between qualitative and quantitative strands, member checking (returning interview summaries to selected participants for confirmation of accuracy), and peer debriefing among the research team during coding. Participation was voluntary; all participants received information about the purpose of the research and provided informed consent prior to data collection; and identifying information was removed from transcripts and research records to protect confidentiality. Ethics approval details are reported in the Declarations section.

5 Results

5.1 Historical and Cultural Reinterpretation of Tuselak

Participants described the term *Tuselak* (or *Selaq*) as commonly interpreted by community members as combining the Sasak words *tau* (person) and *salak* (wrong), referring to a person who deviates from accepted moral and religious norms; this is reported here as a participant interpretation rather than a verified linguistic fact. Informants associated Tuselak with the pursuit of supernatural power through practices considered incompatible with Islamic teaching. Several cultural elders explained, however, that this negative association is itself a historical development rather than an original meaning: prior to the wider Islamization of Lombok, certain forms of spiritual knowledge were reportedly valued for healing and communal protection rather than viewed as deviant. As Islamic teaching became more deeply

embedded in Sasak society, participants explained, such practices were increasingly interpreted as *shirk*, and Tuselak shifted from a once-respected form of spiritual knowledge toward a symbol of moral and religious deviation.

Participants identified several motivations popularly attributed to those believed to pursue Tuselak — including physical attractiveness, social prestige, revenge, self-protection, and extraordinary ability — and, in historical narratives, self-protection during periods of political conflict. Three pathways of transmission were described in the interviews: hereditary transmission within family lineage, transmission through marriage into a family associated with Tuselak, and learning through a spiritual teacher. Participants also described a hierarchy of mystical mastery, with figures at the highest level (locally termed *Datu Tuselak*) attributed the greatest spiritual authority. Within Sasak oral tradition, participants distinguished several named forms of Tuselak, generally grouped into two broader moral categories: forms considered relatively harmless because the associated practice is oriented toward demonstrating mystical skill without directly harming others, and forms considered dangerous because they are believed to be used intentionally to harm people. This distinction indicates that community members do not treat all attributed practitioners as morally equivalent, but evaluate them according to perceived social consequence.

Overall, participants' accounts converge on a historical trajectory: from an earlier association with healing, protection, and communal welfare, toward a contemporary interpretation of Tuselak as a moral narrative warning against the misuse of spiritual power. This shift is treated in the analysis that follows as a case of cultural reinterpretation rather than as an isolated set of beliefs.

5.2 Moral and Pedagogical Meanings Embedded in Tuselak

Across interviews with cultural elders, the *beliyan*, community leaders, and local residents, Tuselak narratives were consistently framed as carrying moral instruction independent of their supernatural content. Participants explained that Tuselak stories are used within families and community settings as cautionary narratives addressing greed, envy, revenge, and the misuse of knowledge, rather than as literal warnings about supernatural danger alone.

One recurring theme concerned the importance of discernment in life choices. Participants repeatedly cited the Sasak proverb *önyak-önyak pete jodoh, ilmu, guru, dait batur* — advising individuals to choose carefully among a life partner, knowledge, teachers, and friends. As one *beliyan* (R1) explained, individuals popularly believed to have become Tuselak were often described as having initially sought knowledge from inappropriate teachers lacking adequate religious grounding; R2 similarly linked inappropriate social relationships and family environment to this trajectory. A second recurring theme concerned emotional regulation, captured in the advice *dendek girang saling talon ate dait dendem* — "do not be jealous, harbour resentment, or seek revenge." According to R5, uncontrolled envy and resentment were described as an early stage of moral decline that participants associated symbolically with the Tuselak narrative.

A third theme concerned religious legitimacy of knowledge: participants distinguished consistently between knowledge acquired through legitimate religious learning and knowledge obtained through practices considered religiously prohibited (*ilmu salah*), locating moral legitimacy in the intention and guidance behind the pursuit of knowledge rather than in knowledge itself. A fourth theme concerned communal responsibility: community leaders explained that Tuselak narratives function as reminders that individual misconduct carries social consequences that extend to family, neighbours, and the wider community, rather than remaining a private matter.

Table 2 summarizes the principal cultural narratives identified in the interviews together with their reported moral or pedagogical meanings.

Table 2
Major Cultural Narratives and Pedagogical Meanings of Tuselak

Cultural narrative	**Community interpretation**	**Moral/pedagogical meaning**
Extraordinary abilities (e.g., transformation, unusual movement)	Attributed to those who pursued forbidden spiritual knowledge	Misuse of knowledge carries moral consequences
Vulnerability to sacred places, religious recitation, and prayer	Believed to limit supernatural power	Religious faith is held to outweigh supernatural power
Dual daytime/nighttime conduct	Outward conformity concealing attributed transgression	Promotes honesty and personal integrity
Secret nocturnal gatherings (*sangkep*)	Collective interaction among those believed to be practitioners	Illustrates the influence of social association
Cleansing rituals after nightly activity	Symbolic purification	Reinforces responsibility for one's actions
Community protective customs (night watches, collective prayer)	Collective vigilance	Strengthens solidarity and communal resilience
Proverb: *önyak-önyak pete jodoh, ilmu, guru, dait batur*	Advice on choosing a partner, knowledge, teacher, and friends wisely	Frames moral formation as shaped by deliberate life choices
Proverb: *dendek girang saling talon ate dait dendem*	Warning against jealousy, resentment, and revenge	Frames emotional self-regulation as a moral safeguard

Taken together, participants' accounts indicate that the educational significance they attribute to Tuselak does not depend on the empirical status of its supernatural claims, but on the moral interpretation the community has built around the narrative — a pattern consistent with the mnemonic and social-regulatory functions attributed to mystical narratives in Section 2.2, though here demonstrated specifically through Sasak participants' own accounts rather than assumed from the wider literature.

5.3 Students' Perceptions of the Educational Relevance of Tuselak

Among the 167 students surveyed, 96.41% reported familiarity with Tuselak, while 3.59% reported no prior familiarity — indicating that the tradition remains widely known within this student population, primarily through family and community narration rather than formal schooling.

Students' views on formal curricular integration were considerably more cautious than their familiarity with the tradition would suggest. Only 20.36% agreed or strongly agreed that Tuselak should be integrated into Social Studies instruction, 65.27% selected a neutral response, and 14.37% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This pattern should not be read as indicating strong support for integration; the modal response was neutrality, not endorsement, and this caution is treated in the Discussion as a substantive finding in its own right rather than as a preliminary result to be explained away.

At the same time, students associated the educational use of Tuselak with a range of specific perceived benefits: 72.46% perceived potential to support critical thinking, 70.65% perceived potential to support cultural awareness, 67.66% perceived relevance to moral education, and 61.08% perceived a contribution to cultural preservation. Preferred instructional approaches favored active and dialogic formats over direct transmission: classroom discussion (38.32%) and field-based ethnographic learning (34.73%) were the most preferred, followed by reflective writing (16.17%) and multimedia-based learning (10.78%). Reported concerns centered on religious sensitivity and the risk of misunderstanding (a combined 55.08% of respondents citing one or both concerns), while 29.34% reported no significant concern and 15.57% questioned the topic's academic relevance.

Read together, these results indicate that students recognized the educational potential of Tuselak — for critical thinking, cultural awareness, moral education, and cultural preservation — while remaining cautious about its formal integration into teaching, preferring that it be approached through discussion and inquiry rather than direct instruction. Table 3 summarizes these results.

Table 3
Students' Perceptions of Tuselak's Educational Relevance (n = 167)

Dimension	Response	n (%)
Familiarity with Tuselak	Familiar	161 (96.41)
	Not familiar	6 (3.59)
Support for integration into Social Studies	Agree/Strongly agree	34 (20.36)
	Neutral	109 (65.27)
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	24 (14.37)
Preferred learning approach	Discussion-based	64 (38.32)
	Field-based/ethnographic	58 (34.73)
	Reflective writing	27 (16.17)
	Multimedia-based	18 (10.78)
Perceived educational benefit	Critical thinking	121 (72.46)
	Cultural awareness	118 (70.65)
	Moral education	113 (67.66)
	Cultural preservation	102 (61.08)
Reported concern	Religious sensitivity/misunderstanding (combined)	92 (55.08)
	No significant concern	49 (29.34)
	Questioned academic relevance	26 (15.57)

5.4 Integrated Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Comparing the two strands directly, three patterns emerge. First, a **convergence**: both cultural custodians and students associated Tuselak with moral meaning, cultural identity, and social responsibility — custodians through narrative content (Section 5.2), students through their ratings of moral education and cultural-preservation benefit (Section 5.3). Second, a **complementarity**: custodians explained the cultural mechanisms through which Tuselak transmits meaning (storytelling, proverb, communal practice), while students described how that meaning is received and evaluated within a contemporary, formal-education setting — two views of the same phenomenon from different vantage points. Third, a **tension**: custodians spoke from within a framework in which the tradition retains active

historical, religious, and moral weight, whereas students, while valuing the tradition, called for critical framing, separation from theological endorsement, and academic distance rather than direct transmission of the narrative as presented by custodians. Table 4 presents this comparison as a joint display.

Table 4
Mixed-Methods Joint Display

Qualitative theme (custodians)	Quantitative evidence (students)	Relationship	Integrated interpretation
Tuselak as moral warning against greed, envy, revenge	67.66% perceived relevance to moral education	Convergence	Moral and Ethical Interpretation
Transmission through family storytelling and proverb	96.41% familiar, primarily via family/community narration	Convergence/Complementarity	Indigenous Cultural Knowledge
Custodians describe Tuselak within an active religious and moral framework	55.08% raised religious-sensitivity or misunderstanding concerns	Tension	Need for Critical Pedagogical Engagement
Communal vigilance and protective customs	61.08% perceived contribution to cultural preservation	Convergence	Cultural continuity
Narrative reinterpretation from literal danger to moral symbol	Only 20.36% supported direct curricular integration despite 72.46% seeing critical-thinking potential	Complementarity/Tension	Basis for critical, inquiry-based (not direct) integration

This tension — rather than any single strand alone — is treated in the Discussion as the empirical foundation for the Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework proposed in Section 6.4.

6 Discussion

6.1 From Mystical Heritage to Indigenous Cultural Pedagogy

The findings indicate that Tuselak has not disappeared under the pressures of religious reform, modernization, and formal education, but has instead been reinterpreted: from an account of literal supernatural danger toward a moral narrative addressing responsibility, humility, self-control, and religious awareness (Section 5.1–5.2). This pattern is consistent with the view that indigenous knowledge is adaptive and intergenerational rather than static [5, 6], and it extends that literature by

showing the mechanism of adaptation in a single, contested case: reinterpretation operating simultaneously through religious change, family transmission, and — as the student data show — generational shift in interpretive stance. Cultural continuity here does not depend on preserving the belief unchanged; it depends on the community's, and now the students', capacity to keep renegotiating what the narrative means.

6.2 Negotiating Cultural Heritage, Religion, and Critical Education

Tuselak sits at the intersection of three epistemic spaces that do not always align: cultural memory, religious interpretation, and formal or critical education. Custodian interviews located Tuselak within an active religious and moral framework, treating its warnings as continuous with lived religious life. Students, while valuing the tradition, sought critical distance from that framework, favoring inquiry and discussion over direct transmission (Section 5.3–5.4). Neither position is adopted here as the study's own conclusion. Affirming Tuselak's supernatural claims as true would exceed what the data can support; dismissing it outright as superstition would erase the moral and cultural work that both custodians and students attribute to it. The position this study takes instead is that Tuselak can be treated as a cultural narrative and an object of critical inquiry — a position that neither the custodians nor the students individually stated in these terms, but one that the tension between their perspectives, read together, makes analytically necessary.

6.3 Tuselak as a Resource for Culturally Responsive Education

The pattern of results — high familiarity, recognized benefit, yet caution toward direct integration — indicates that cultural relevance on its own was not sufficient for students to endorse curricular inclusion. What students appeared to be asking for, based on their preference for discussion-based and field-based approaches over direct instruction (Section 5.3), was critical mediation: engagement with Tuselak as a subject of inquiry, comparison, and reflection rather than as content to be affirmed or transmitted uncritically. This refines the theoretical premise introduced in Section 3.3 — that culturally responsive education is not equivalent to uncritical cultural affirmation — by grounding it in a specific empirical pattern: students in this study valued the culture while resisting the pedagogy of direct transmission.

6.4 Development of the Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework

The Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework (TCPF) is developed here, after the presentation of findings, as an integration of the patterns described in Sections 5.1–5.4 and 6.1–6.3, rather than as a framework that guided data collection from the outset. It comprises four components.

Indigenous Cultural Knowledge refers to the body of narratives, proverbs, and customary practice through which Tuselak is transmitted (Section 5.1–5.2; Table 2), grounded directly in custodian interview data.

Moral and Ethical Interpretation refers to the specific ethical content — responsibility, humility, self-control, honesty, religious awareness — that custodians attribute to Tuselak narratives (Section 5.2), and that students independently rated as a perceived educational benefit (67.66%; Section 5.3).

Critical Pedagogical Engagement refers to the inquiry-based, discussion-oriented, and field-based approaches that students favored over direct instruction (Section 5.3), read together with the tension identified in Section 5.4 between custodians' active moral-religious framing and students' call for critical distance. This component exists in the framework specifically because the data show *tension*, not agreement: without that tension, there would be no analytic case for treating critical mediation as a distinct, necessary component rather than an optional add-on.

The fourth component in earlier drafts of this framework was termed *Transformative Citizenship Outcomes*; that label is not retained here, because this study did not implement TCPF-guided instruction in a classroom or measure any change in students' citizenship orientation. Instead, the fourth component is termed **Educational and Civic Orientations**, referring to the pattern — visible in students' own ratings of perceived benefit for cultural awareness (70.65%) and cultural preservation (61.08%) — that engaging critically with contested heritage was associated, in students' own reported perceptions, with broader orientations toward cultural identity and civic life. This is reported as a perceived orientation, not a demonstrated outcome.

Figure 1 presents the framework as a simple diagram. The four components are shown as an interconnected cycle rather than a linear sequence: indigenous cultural knowledge supplies the narrative content; moral and ethical interpretation gives that content pedagogical meaning; critical pedagogical engagement supplies the method by which learners examine it; and the resulting educational and civic orientations feed back into how the community and its students continue to reinterpret the tradition.

7 Educational Implications

For **teachers**, the findings suggest that Tuselak — and contested heritage more broadly — is better approached through inquiry, discussion, oral history, comparison of perspectives, and reflective writing than through direct transmission of the narrative as fact or straightforward dismissal of it as superstition.

For **curriculum developers**, the findings suggest that contested cultural heritage is most productively positioned as a learning resource for critical and historical inquiry rather than as either theological content or decorative cultural illustration.

For **teacher education**, the findings point to a need to prepare prospective teachers specifically to facilitate discussion of contested cultural material — content that is neither straightforwardly factual nor

straightforwardly false within the community itself — with the interpretive care this requires.

For **cultural communities**, the findings suggest that formal education, approached critically rather than dismissively, can support intergenerational transmission of heritage such as Tuselak without requiring communities to give up the critical distance younger generations increasingly bring to it.

8 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. The qualitative strand draws on nine cultural custodians from a single regional context; the quantitative strand draws on students from a single university; and sampling in both strands was purposive rather than random. Quantitative analysis was descriptive only, and the findings describe *perceptions* rather than actual classroom outcomes. Interview translation from Sasak and Indonesian into English was conducted by the research team without formal back-translation. Formal reliability statistics for the questionnaire were not computed. The TCPF has not been tested through classroom intervention. These limitations mean the findings should be read as specific to the Sasak/Lombok context studied here, potentially transferable to other contested-heritage cases but requiring further validation rather than assumed to generalize.

Future research could test the TCPF through classroom implementation studies, examine teacher preparation for engaging contested cultural material, compare Tuselak with other contested traditions within Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and pursue longitudinal or triadic (teacher–student–community) designs to trace how interpretations of such traditions continue to shift over time.

9. Conclusion

This study examined how the Tuselak tradition of the Sasak people is reinterpreted culturally and pedagogically, and how its educational relevance is perceived by prospective Social Studies teachers. Cultural custodians described a historical shift from literal supernatural narrative toward moral instruction concerning responsibility, humility, self-control, and religious awareness; students recognized the cultural and educational value of the tradition while remaining cautious about its direct integration into formal instruction.

For scholarship on indigenous and cultural pedagogy, these findings show that reinterpretation — rather than either preservation of belief unchanged or outright rejection — offers a viable account of how contested heritage remains meaningful across generations. The tension between custodian and student perspectives is not a limitation to be resolved away but a substantive finding: it is precisely this tension that makes critical pedagogical mediation necessary rather than optional.

The Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework synthesizes this study's findings into four components — Indigenous Cultural Knowledge, Moral and Ethical Interpretation, Critical Pedagogical Engagement, and Educational and Civic Orientations — offered as a conceptual pathway for engaging contested heritage critically, pending classroom-based validation.

More broadly, this study suggests that cultural continuity does not necessarily depend on preserving beliefs unchanged; it may also be sustained through critical educational reinterpretation — a possibility with relevance beyond the Sasak case, for any community negotiating how to hold contested heritage within contemporary education.

Declarations

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Author contributions

Mohammad Liwa Irrubai conceptualized the study, developed the research design, conducted data collection, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Marham Jupri Hadi contributed to data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the cultural sensitivity of the research material and the terms of informed consent. Anonymized data or relevant excerpts may be made available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram). The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Signed informed consent was gained from all participants prior to data collection. Before signing the form, all participants were aware of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Declaration of generative AI use

Microsoft Copilot was used exclusively for grammar and language editing of the final manuscript draft. All three authors reviewed every section of the manuscript and take full intellectual responsibility for all content. No AI tool was used in data collection, analysis, interpretation, or theoretical development.

Declaration of generative AI use

Grammarly was used solely for language proofreading and copy editing. The authors are fully responsible for the content, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions of the manuscript.

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Figures

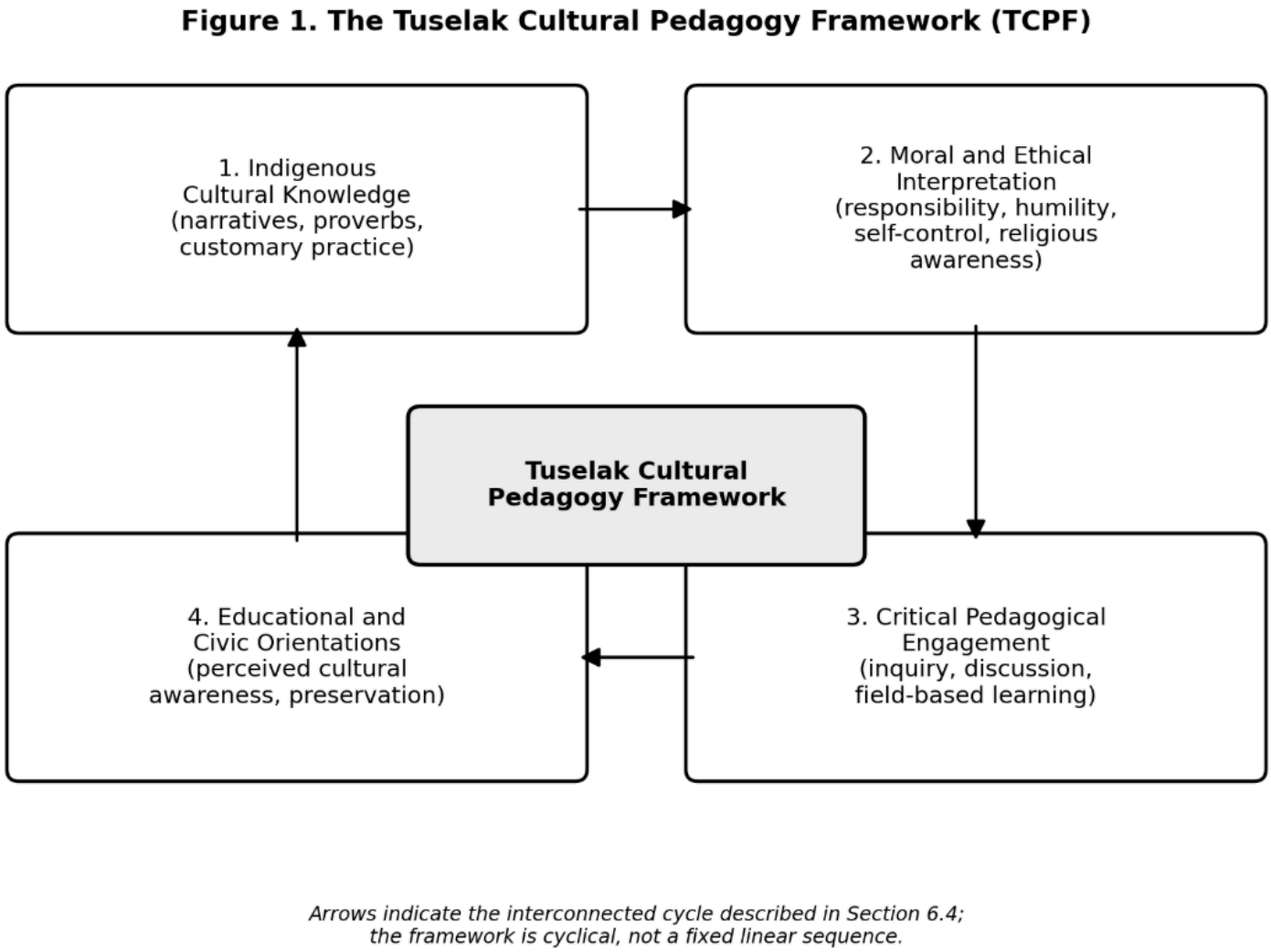


Figure 1

The Tuselak Cultural Pedagogy Framework (TCPF)

The TCPF is offered as a conceptual model grounded in this study's data, not as a validated instructional program. It proposes a pedagogical pathway through which contested heritage can be engaged critically; it does not claim to improve critical thinking, strengthen citizenship, or otherwise demonstrate effectiveness, since no classroom intervention was tested. Classroom-based validation is identified as a direction for future research in Section 8.