



Ecopedagogy through Makassar Paddy Mantras: A Model for Character Education and Environment Literacy

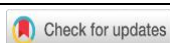
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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article aims to explore the potential of paddy mantras from the Makassar community as a culturally embedded learning resource within the framework of ecopedagogy. **Method:** Employing a qualitative approach through field observation and documentation, this study reveals that paddy mantras contain ecological, spiritual, and social values that are highly relevant to the character development of primary school students. **Results:** Findings indicate that the integration of local texts not only enhances students' ecological awareness and character formation but also strengthens cultural identity and collaborative spirit within the school environment, particularly at Inpres Ko'mara 1 Elementary School. Thus, tradition-based teaching serves as a strategic step toward achieving contextualized, character-oriented, and environmentally conscious primary education. **Novelty:** The unique contribution of this study lies in the integration of traditional paddy mantras into modern educational practices through innovative methods, such as mini planting projects, visual reflections, and the creation of local vocabulary booklets. Furthermore, the study bridges these local wisdom values with the dimensions of moral knowing as conceptualized by Lickona (1991), including perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge thereby offering a novel model of ecopedagogical application in elementary education.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognized as a nation with a vast reservoir of indigenous knowledge, transmitted intergenerationally through language, traditional texts, and communal cultural practices. This knowledge is embodied in various local rituals and belief systems that reflect an ecocentric worldview emphasizing the interrelation between human beings, nature, and the Divine. Across the archipelago, diverse ceremonial traditions such as *Seba* among the Baduy, *Subak* in Bali, and *Ma'nene'* among the Toraja illustrate effort indigenous communities maintain ecological and spiritual balance through cultural continuity. The persistence of such practices signifies the resilience of local epistemologies that continue to shape identity, social norms, and environmental ethics in contemporary Indonesian society.

The urgency of incorporating local knowledge in each region plays a vital role in shaping students' character. This premise aligns with the findings of (Rahmatih et al., 2020) who state that local wisdom 'contains values that can be reflected in science education, such as the *Awik-awik*, a traditional code of conduct from the Sasak ethnic group'. Various elements of traditional knowledge ranging from folklore to traditional games can be meaningfully integrated into education (Hasugian et al., 2024) for instance, emphasize that traditional games support the transmission of local knowledge through learning activities and curriculum synchronization. Other studies related to

local wisdom (in the forms of language, art, culture, and regional ethnic identity) include (Ahmad et al., 2021) who explore traditional culinary knowledge; (Annisa et al., 2025) who examine the role of cultural literacy through Brain Gym as an innovative learning approach; (Syah & Agus 2022) who present ecopedagogy as a model for building environmental awareness. The development of teaching materials based on local wisdom has been shown to improve students' knowledge acquisition (Maulina et al., 2018). Selain itu, (Brinje et al., 2025); (Haerunnisa et al., 2020); (B. Dole et al., 2020); (Asmah et al., 2022); (Fahrozy, F. P. N. et al., 2022); (Rahmiati, 2024); (Irpan et al., 2024); (Hakimah et al., 2024); (Izzah Muyassaroh, Amiroh, Maryadi, 2016) demonstrate the application of local content in primary education. These studies contribute to the development of learning materials, curriculum enhancement, teacher training, student interest cultivation, and the promotion of regional cultural excellence. Additionally, various digital tools have supported this movement by enhancing students' intelligence, environmental sensitivity, and appreciation for Indonesia's rich cultural and traditional heritage.

One significant yet underexplored form of local knowledge in primary education is the use of paddy mantras as instructional material sacred utterances employed in the agricultural practices of agrarian communities. In South Sulawesi, particularly among the Makassar people, these mantras are not merely spiritual expressions; they also embody ecological, social, and cultural values that have been transmitted across generations through lontarak texts and ritual practices. These values reflect an ecological intelligence shaped by the long standing interaction between humans, nature, and their living environment.

Nevertheless, these noble values have not been fully integrated into the formal education system, particularly at the primary education (PE) level. In this context, ecopedagogy an educational approach that interconnects ecological, cultural, and social dimensions offers a strategic framework for revitalizing local knowledge as a contextual and transformative learning resource. Primary schools (hereafter abbreviated as PS), as the foundation for shaping children's character, require instructional materials that go beyond cognitive content to also instill values of environmental awareness, cultural identity, and grounded spirituality.

The shift from linguistic and cultural studies toward ecopedagogy in primary education becomes relevant when we recognize that local wisdom such as paddy mantras can be adapted as local content material or as enrichment for character education in schools. The ecological narratives found in mantra texts such as verses about natural cycles, the interconnectedness between humans and the land, and prayers for a blessed harvest can be employed to foster early ecological awareness among primary school students. Moreover, the religious and social values embedded in the mantras open pathways for interdisciplinary learning across subjects such as Indonesian Language, Civics Education (PPKn), and Religious Education. Several educational studies have shown that integrating local wisdom into learning not only enhances student participation and motivation, but also strengthens their sense of belonging to their culture and surrounding environment. Therefore, revitalizing traditional oral texts such as paddy mantras within the primary education curriculum



constitutes an essential step toward realizing character-based, contextual, and ecologically conscious education.

Building on this background, the research question addressed is: how do students respond to local language or local content instruction that integrates local wisdom particularly focusing on how the ecological and spiritual values embedded in such texts can be utilized as learning resources in character education or local content learning in primary schools? This article aims to explore the potential of Makassarese paddy mantras as a medium for ecopedagogy in primary education. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural linguistics and pedagogy, this study offers a preliminary framework for utilizing local knowledge as an integral part of meaningful learning for the younger generation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using field observation and ethnographic methods as the primary data collection techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Observations were systematically conducted in selected elementary schools and indigenous communities in South Sulawesi. In the school setting, the observations focused on the implementation of local content curricula, classroom learning activities, and teacher-student interactions in the context of cultural education. In the indigenous communities, data collection was directed toward cultural practices, oral traditions, and ecological rituals deemed pedagogically relevant.

The study involved ten community respondents representing two active farming groups, as well as three cultural figures from Baarugaya Village. These traditional leaders were drawn from three different hamlets, namely Dusun Pangkajene, Balla Borong and Dusun Borong Karamasak. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore ecological knowledge, spiritual values, and cultural practices that hold potential as contextual learning resources.

To ensure the validity of findings, the research employed data triangulation through the integration of participant observation, audiovisual documentation, and detailed field notes. The researcher's reflexive engagement grounded in prior field experience within the studied communities enabled deeper contextual understanding while maintaining analytical distance to minimize subjective bias. The collected data, including transcriptions of utterances, photographs of ritual objects, and written records, were systematically organized for analysis.

The analytical process involved thematic coding and classification of the data according to the requirements of instructional model design. This interpretive phase was guided by an ecopedagogical framework, further supported by ecosemiotic perspectives to identify ecological values and symbolic representations embedded in the local traditions encountered during the fieldwork.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Revitalization of Ecological Values in Elementary School Ecopedagogy

This study finds that the agrarian mantra texts of the Makassar community contain essential values that can be utilized in primary education as part of culturally based local content. Through an ecopedagogical approach, these values are positioned as

educational tools that foster ecological intelligence, spiritual awareness, and appreciation for local cultural heritage. Originally ritualistic in nature, paddy mantra texts reveal a rich narrative and symbolic dimension that can be introduced to primary school students through contextual learning. The analysis shows that each line of the mantra conveys messages about the relationship between humans and nature, the importance of balance, and the recognition of spiritual forces in everyday life.

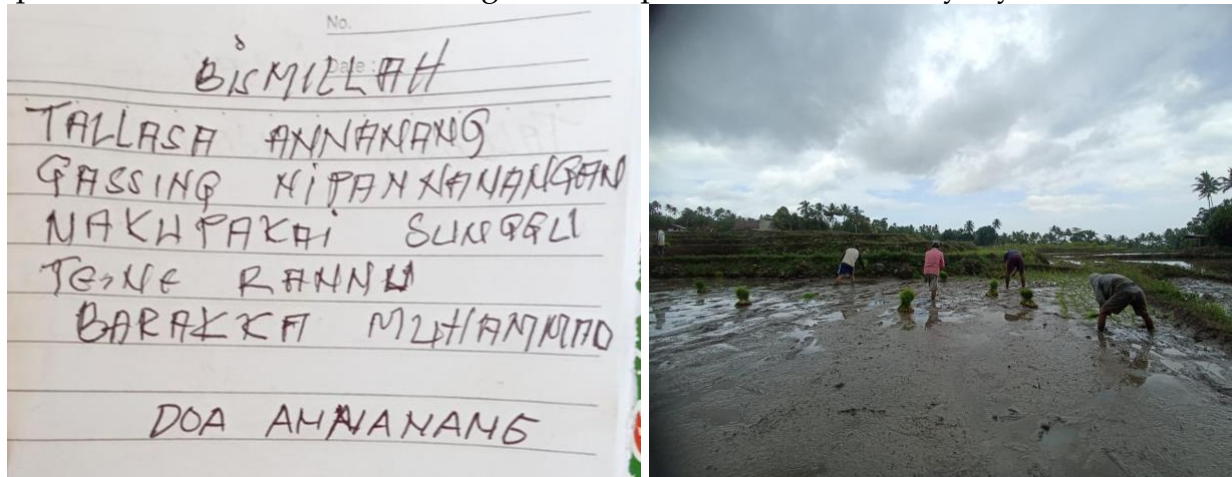


Figure 1. Paddy Mantra Text

Source: Farmer's property, documented by researchers during interviews, 2024

1. Ecological Values: Environmental Love Education from Tradition

Mantra seperti "Tallasak anngiorok" (life that sows seeds) reflects the farmer's ecological view of nature. Land, seeds, and water are not merely means of production, but part of the sacred cycle of life. This concept can be introduced to students in science lessons, local content, or environmental-based projects. Implementation in Elementary School:

- Planting mini paddy crops in pots or in the schoolyard.
- Introducing the agricultural cycle through local folktales.
- Thematic class project: "From Soil to Table" students trace the journey of paddy from seed to food.



Figure 2. Text of the Rice Mantra 'Harvest Prayer'
Source: Researcher documentation, 2024

2. Spiritual Values: Strengthening Culture-Based Character Education

The lines *"Bismillah"* and *"Barakka Muhamma"* reflect values of religiosity and an acknowledgment of divine power in every stage of labor. Character education in primary schools can reinforce values such as gratitude, effort, and prayer by introducing students to these local traditions. Implementation in Primary Schools:

- Collective prayer before learning activities, inspired by farmers' mantras. While students may already be familiar with pre-lesson prayers, learning from farmers' mantras helps them realize that every endeavor even farming requires prayer, even when expressed in local languages.
- Creating a pocketbook titled *"Prayers and Hopes of Farmers"* as a tool for student reflection.
- Integrating religious values into Islamic Education (PAI) activities through local cultural contexts.

3. Social Values: Mutual Cooperation and Collaboration Learning

The practice of chanting mantras during collective activities such as communal harvests is not merely an oral tradition, but also serves as a medium for instilling the values of mutual cooperation and social solidarity. These values form a crucial foundation for character education, particularly in fostering students social awareness and collaborative spirit within the school environment. Implementation in Primary Schools:

- Simulation of harvest activities in the form of group games.
- Picture story: "Harvest Day with Grandma" (based on local experiences).
- Class competition about togetherness in work.

4. Multimodal Media: Visualization and Cultural Literacy

Mantra texts possess poetic, symbolic, and visual power, as reflected in lines such as *'Kamma moncong dallekku'* (my sustenance is like a mountain) or *'kassi ritamparanga'* (like sand in the sea). These expressions can serve as valuable material for developing visual literacy and fostering appreciation for local literary traditions. Implementation in Primary Schools:

- Drawing the meaning of the mantra lines (example: children drawing mountains and paddy).
- Turn the spell into a children's poem or simple song.
- Making a small dictionary "Mantra Language and Its Natural Meaning".

5. Digitizing Local Knowledge for Interactive Learning

Through applications such as FLEX or Lexique Pro, mantra texts can be transformed into digital learning media, including vocabulary flashcards, interactive quizzes, or audiovisual recordings of mantra recitations. Implementation in Primary Schools

- Use of applications to learn local agricultural terms.
- Teacher workshop: developing learning content based on regional culture.

c. Educational game "Guess the Meaning of the Mantra".

Visualization of Mantra Integration in Primary Education

The following is a schematic flow of how paddy mantra values are implemented into classroom learning:

Mantra Line	Cultural & Ecological Values Embedded	Potential Implementation in Primary School
<i>Tallasak anggiorok</i>	Ecological values: respect for the process of sowing seeds, planting cycles, and the perseverance of farmers in their work. Cultural values: labor as a form of devotion to God (Allah), since life is not solely for ritual worship, but also includes engaging in positive and beneficial acts for others as part of spiritual practice.	Students are invited to plant rice seedlings in pots as an outdoor learning activity (green class) that reflects the process of farming. Additionally, students listen to the recitation of mantras by the teacher either directly or through audio-visual media and write down several vocabulary items whose meanings they understand, as part of reinforcing cultural comprehension.
<i>Barakka muhamma</i>	Spiritual values: praying to God for blessings upon the harvest. Cultural values: recognition of unseen spiritual forces in agricultural practices.	Students write prayers and hopes for nature, learn the meaning of <i>barakka</i> (blessing) in local culture, and practice mindfulness while caring for plants. At the beginning of class, teachers lead students in a collective prayer to instill the value that every action should begin with prayer and parental blessings, mirroring the way farmers seek divine grace before beginning their work.
<i>Kamma moncong dallekku</i>	Values of hope and economy: rice as a symbol of sustenance and abundance. Aesthetic values: poetic diction used to convey meaning.	Students are guided to compose poems or short stories about rice and its contributions to society. In doing so, they are introduced to symbolic representations in agricultural rituals that honor the spiritual aspects of nature. Education focuses on conveying that rituals are not mere myths, but expressions of prayer, hope, and reverence for nature as a living space, a place of social interaction, and a means of devotion to the Creator.
<i>Nakupakei sunggu tekne</i>	Social solidarity: sharing harvest yields, collective labor, and cooperation. Moral values: the importance of togetherness in safeguarding the earth's produce.	Through role play activities on harvest time cooperation and creating posters themed "From Farmers to All", students are encouraged to appreciate nature's produce. It is emphasized that successful harvests are not solely the result of human effort, but also the work of God and the support of natural ecosystems. Students are guided to understand that knowledge does not come solely from books or people, but also from the ecological environment as a source of character education. Just like rice that bows as it ripens, the more students learn, the more humble and wise they should become fostering love for the homeland, respect for

Mantra Line	Cultural & Ecological Values Embedded	Potential Implementation in Primary School
		nature, and care for others.

"After learning about harvest mantras, students came to understand that paddy cultivation is not merely a form of labor, but also an expression of prayer and hope," (Grade IV Teacher, SDN 215 Inpres Kupanga).

Implications for Basic Education

These findings indicate that integrating the ecological, spiritual, and cultural values of paddy mantras into primary school learning has the potential to: enhance student participation and motivation; foster love for the homeland and the environment; and strengthen character development rooted in local identity. Furthermore, the development of teaching materials based on paddy mantras can contribute to the 'Merdeka Belajar' (Independent Learning) curriculum by encouraging teachers to design contextual modules that resonate with students' cultural backgrounds. The values embedded in paddy mantras also align with the dimensions of the (Profile of Pancasila Students, such as faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, collaboration, and critical thinking. This suggests that these local texts are relevant for shaping student character in line with the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Students who form emotional connections with nature are generally more engaged in nature-oriented activities as they grow older and advance through their education. One key benefit of this connection is the development of a deep sense of environmental responsibility (Mohamed et al., 2022). For instance, after understanding the long and laborious process of turning paddy into food, students are more likely to appreciate meals and avoid waste, as they come to understand the meaning and value behind every grain of paddy



Figure 3. Students' enthusiasm in reciting the Kepadian mantra text
 Source: Researcher documentation, 2024

After watching and listening to an audiovisual presentation featuring paddy-related narratives, poetry, and video, students were asked to write down five words they heard during the viewing. This ability to record words marks the initial stage of knowledge formation that can lead to a sense of pride in cultural identity particularly their local village heritage, and more broadly, Indonesian culture. It is from culturally grounded village thinking that the potential for global thinking emerges. As noted by

(Monem, 2024) a global perspective must develop interdisciplinary units that integrate social studies and environmental education, enabling students to connect local issues with global challenges. Students wrote with enthusiasm, and such enthusiasm reflects the activation of critical thinking. This indicates that an active learning approach is one of the most effective methods to foster students environmental awareness and responsibility (Özdemir, 2022).

While student-centered care is a priority, providing support for teachers is equally essential, as both resources and environmental awareness must begin with the teacher to ensure effective knowledge transfer. Therefore, the application of ecopedagogical principles in the teaching process also promotes the development of environmental awareness among teachers. This, in turn, enhances their environmental literacy and supports the effective delivery of environmental knowledge to students (Samur & Akman, 2023).



Figure 4. Utilization of organic waste by students as an ecopedagogy based learning medium.

Source: Researcher's Documentation, 2024.

At State Elementary School 215 Kupanga, fifth-grade students successfully completed a meaningful yet simple project by transforming discarded ice cream sticks into decorative artworks displayed on their classroom walls. This activity was not merely an art project, but part of an ecopedagogical approach that emphasizes the interconnectedness between learning, creativity, and environmental stewardship (Gadotti, 2008; Sterling, 2010). The visual documentation presented in Figure 4 is considered essential to include, even though the primary focus of this research lies in integrating the values of *paddy mantras* into classroom learning. This is because the project reflects the same spirit embodied in the essence of the mantras: a reverence for nature, collective work, and grounded spirituality (Bang & Door, 2007; Shiva, 2005).

The creation of artworks from ice cream sticks serves as a concrete reflection of the application of ecopedagogical values within the elementary school environment. According to Capra (1996), education should not separate theory from practice, but rather cultivate ecological awareness through lived experiences. In this context, students are not only encouraged to engage with local texts (mantras), but are also provided with opportunities to create and actively manifest ecological values through waste recycling activities (Gruenewald, 2003; Orr, 2004). Such activities reinforce the understanding that the environment is not merely a passive object, but a living agent of learning (Kahn, 2010; UNESCO, 2017).

Furthermore, students' involvement in this project has been shown to influence changes in their attitudes and character. This aligns with the findings of Yusnan (2022), who notes that character formation in students is strongly shaped by the support of teachers, families, and the social environment. In practice, when opportunities to nurture such character are provided through creative and contextual approaches, positive transformations occur within students (Yusnita & Muqowim, 2020). They become more attentive to cleanliness, collaborate effectively with classmates, and express pride in the works they have created (Sukardi, 2021; Handayani & Putri, 2020).

According to Adela and Permana (2020), simple practices such as recycling represent tangible contributions to environmental preservation while also supporting the strengthening of character education grounded in local values. This activity fosters the awareness that caring for the Earth is part of humanity's moral responsibility (Nasution, 2019), as reflected in the spiritual values embedded in the *paddy mantras*, which consistently link agricultural labor with prayer and hope (Nasaruddin, 2022; Maulida & Wahyudi, 2021). Therefore, the ice cream stick project and mantra-based learning are not two separate entities, but rather complementary efforts in cultivating ecological awareness and social religiosity (Subekti, 2020; Ridwan, 2021).

As a formal educational institution, the primary school plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral foundations, especially considering that the six years of study at this level constitute a critical phase for instilling values of ethics and respectful behavior. Lickona, (1991) categorizes moral education into three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. This study focuses on the dimension of moral knowing, which includes six subcomponents. The following is an illustration of this moral concept.

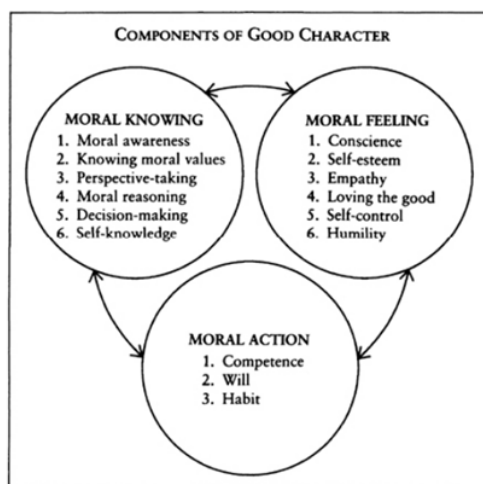


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework of Thomas Lickona in Character Education

Lickona (1991) categorizes moral education into three core dimensions: *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. This study focuses on *moral knowing*, which consists of six interrelated subcomponents. These dimensions are not treated abstractly, but are contextualized through the values embedded in Makassarese paddy mantras, which serve as culturally grounded moral texts. The following discussion connects each component of Lickona's moral knowing with the specific values found in the rice mantras documented from the Makassar community.



1. Moral awareness

Students begin to build moral awareness when teachers facilitate learning that connects local language and texts to ethical and ecological concerns. In the context of Makassar, students are exposed to mantras that depict the paddy not merely as a crop, but as a “gift from Allah” and a sacred element in human survival. For instance, the mantra “*Barakka muhamma*” (‘blessing be upon you’) opens moral space to discuss how gratitude toward nature and God is expressed through agricultural practices. This awareness helps students identify the relevance of moral issues within their immediate cultural and natural environments.

2. Knowing moral value

Mantras such as “*Tallasak anggiorok*” emphasize perseverance and collective labor. These values mirror the honesty and mutual responsibility seen in the local farming community. For example, as observed in the village surrounding SDN 215 Kupanga, harvested rice left in the fields remains untouched by theft an implicit cultural ethic that reflects deeply internalized values of integrity and respect. Additionally, the presence of Islamic nuances within the mantras illustrates how traditional belief systems coexist with religious teachings, providing a clear model of tolerance and cultural continuity.

3. Perspective-taking

The rice mantras allow students to enter the worldview of farmers. Through lines such as “*Nakupakei sunggu tekne*” (‘we give our strength together’), students are encouraged to imagine the hardship, collaboration, and hope involved in agricultural life. They begin to appreciate the interdependence between humans and nature and understand their parents’ or neighbors’ roles not just as laborers, but as stewards of the land. This empathetic stance is fundamental for building social sensitivity and ecological consciousness.

4. Moral reasoning

The reflective structure of the mantras encourages moral dialogue. For instance, a discussion of why paddy must be respected (e.g., “*Kamma moncong dallekku*” ‘may my fortune come forth’) leads students to consider the moral implications of wasting food or disrespecting the harvest. Teachers can prompt students to reason: Is it right to throw away rice? Why do farmers offer prayers before planting? These discussions train students to assess right and wrong based on shared values and contextual understanding, not merely on authority or rules.

5. Decision-making

Exposure to the cultural and spiritual meaning of paddy encourages students to make informed, ethical choices. After engaging with the mantra texts, many students expressed a new reluctance to waste food, acknowledging that each grain represents labor, tradition, and divine blessing. In classroom activities such as food-sharing, creating eco-posters, or simulating planting rituals students practice making decisions grounded in ecological ethics and social responsibility.

6. Self knowledge

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of this learning model is the invitation for students to reflect on themselves. By engaging with local mantras, students begin



asking: *Have I been grateful for the food I eat? Have I treated the land with respect?* This process fosters an internalization of values, where students are not only aware of external standards but also develop personal convictions aligned with the wisdom of their culture. As one student reflected during an interview: *"Now I understand why my grandfather never let us step on spilled rice it's not just food, it's a blessing."*

In summary, the six dimensions of *moral knowing* are not merely theoretical categories in this study but are realized in practice through the culturally situated learning of paddy mantras. These mantras act as ethical texts that guide learners toward becoming morally grounded, environmentally aware, and culturally connected individuals.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding

This study reveals that paddy mantras, as part of the oral tradition of the Makassar community, contain narrative, ethical, and ecological values that are pedagogically transformative. When integrated into primary education, these mantras offer more than cultural preservation they enable the development of character-based, environmentally conscious, and locally rooted learning models. Using the ecopedagogical framework supported by ecosemiotic analysis, the study affirms that local texts are not mere cultural artifacts, but active vehicles for cultivating empathy toward nature, humanity, and spirituality in early education.

Implication

The findings of this study offer significant implications for educational policy, curriculum development, and teacher training. Embedding paddy mantras into learning materials does not only preserve cultural heritage, but also supports the development of ecological intelligence and moral values among young learners. This approach positions local knowledge as a dynamic asset in shaping holistic education one that integrates culture, spirituality, and environmental ethics. For policymakers, this calls for a paradigm shift: from uniform, test-driven instruction to culturally rooted, place-based learning models. For educators, this implies the need for sustained professional development programs that equip teachers to act not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but as cultural facilitators and ethical role models. Furthermore, this initiative opens pathways for extensive research roadmaps and collaborative efforts in the development of teaching materials for primary and secondary education. This study adopts ecopedagogy as its overarching theoretical framework, supported by complementary perspectives such as ecosemiotics and the projected use of digital applications, including Flex and Lexique Pro, in subsequent research stages. Ecosemiotics is applied to classify data related to the ecological contexts of indigenous communities particularly in relation to local flora and fauna and to interpret the signs and symbols embedded in cultural environments. Meanwhile, Flex and Lexique Pro are envisioned as digital tools for data input and management, to be introduced to educators through targeted workshops. The outputs of these applications,

such as mini-dictionaries, are expected to enhance student engagement and focus by serving as interactive and culturally relevant learning aids.

Limitation

While the study offers a rich qualitative interpretation, its scope is limited to a specific cultural linguistic group within South Sulawesi. The focus on selected mantras and a small number of primary schools restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the technological tools proposed (such as Flex and Lexique Pro) have not yet been tested in classroom settings, and their impact remains to be empirically evaluated in terms of usability, student engagement, and teacher readiness.

Future Research

Future research should adopt interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to test the integration of cultural texts, such as paddy mantras, into school-based practices across diverse regions in Indonesia. There is a growing need to develop and evaluate digital tools such as Flex and Lexique Pro within real classrooms to assess their functionality, accessibility, and impact on students' engagement and language development. In addition, longitudinal studies are recommended to trace how local knowledge, when introduced from an early age, influences students' character, ecological sensitivity, and cultural identity over time. Researchers are also encouraged to explore comparative studies between regions, integrating indigenous pedagogies with national curriculum goals to co-create a robust, pluralistic framework for ecopedagogical innovation.

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