



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



# LOCAL HERITAGE AS LIVING TEXT: INTEGRATING TORAJA WOODCARVING AND THE MINAHASAN MANGUNI MYTH INTO CULTURAL LITERACY EDUCATION IN INDONESIAN SCHOOLS

Mayske Rinny Liando<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Manado, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesia's cultural heritage offers immense potential as a pedagogical resource; however, formal schooling often reduces local traditions to mere superficial familiarity rather than fostering a deep, interpretive understanding. Drawing upon two symbolic traditions, Torajan woodcarving in South Sulawesi and the Manguni myth of the Minahasa people in North Sulawesi, this study proposes an integrative ethnopedagogical model to strengthen cultural literacy within the teaching of Indonesian language, literature, and the arts. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design complemented by semiotic and ethnopedagogical analyses, the study pursues three objectives: (1) mapping the gap between students' familiarity with and their interpretation of visual and narrative heritage; (2) analyzing the semiotic, linguistic, and ethnopedagogical values embedded in Torajan carvings and the Manguni myth; and (3) developing and validating a critical-contextual learning model aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile). Quantitative data will be collected from approximately 300 upper-primary and high school students using culture-based literacy instruments and analyzed via cluster and comparative statistics, while qualitative data will be gathered through interviews with teachers, traditional leaders, and artisans; classroom observations; and document analysis. The study anticipates that students will demonstrate strong superficial familiarity but struggle to grasp symbolic, ritual, and ecological meanings, noting that exposure within family and community settings significantly shapes their interpretive beliefs. The expected contribution is a cross-regional learning framework that transforms local symbols into "living texts" through critical listening, multimodal reading, and productive writing and design tasks, thereby fostering ecological awareness, critical reasoning, and an appreciation for global diversity. By integrating tangible and intangible heritage into a single pedagogical model, this study offers a scalable cultural heritage education strategy that bridges modernization with deeply rooted cultural sustainability, while providing empirical evidence for curriculum developers, teacher education programs, and cultural policy stakeholders.

## Introduction

Indonesian language and literature instruction in elementary schools has historically been positioned not merely as a mechanism for honing mechanical language competencies, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but as a foundational vehicle for transmitting cultural values, ethical norms, and national character (Abidin et al., 2021). In recent years, this pedagogical orientation has undergone a significant paradigmatic shift under the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum). Moving beyond a narrow, functionalist conception of literacy that prioritizes decoding and encoding skills, the curriculum now explicitly frames literacy as a multidimensional practice encompassing cultural, civic, and critical dimensions. This reconceptualization positions language education as the primary conduit for cultivating the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile), which emphasizes dimensions such as cultural diversity, cooperation, critical reasoning, and ecological awareness. Within this framework, literary and linguistic materials are no longer treated as isolated textual artifacts but as dynamic cultural repositories that shape students' worldviews, ethical sensibilities, and sense of belonging. Consequently, the selection, interpretation, and

**Corresponding Author:** Mayske Rinny Liando, Email: [mayske\\_liando@unima.ac.id](mailto:mayske_liando@unima.ac.id)  
Universitas Negeri Manado, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi, Indonesia

pedagogical deployment of reading materials in primary classrooms carry profound implications for how younger generations internalize national identity, cultural continuity, and civic responsibility.

Despite this ambitious curricular vision, empirical observations and pedagogical audits reveal a persistent and widening gap between the literacy texts prescribed in formal classrooms and the lived socio-cultural realities in which elementary students are embedded. The rapid acceleration of digital modernization, coupled with the globalization of educational publishing, has increasingly standardized learning materials, often at the expense of local contextualization. Textbooks frequently prioritize universally relatable or commercially viable narratives, resulting in the marginalization of region-specific cultural knowledge. As a consequence, many elementary students experience a gradual erosion of local cultural understanding, as their daily linguistic and literary exposure becomes dominated by generic, homogenized, and often imported narrative forms (Danandjaja, 2014; Suyitno, 2020). This disconnect is particularly acute in archipelagic regions where indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and ecological wisdom remain vibrant in community life but are conspicuously absent from formal pedagogical discourse. The resulting cultural dissonance not only weakens students' attachment to their heritage but also limits their capacity to engage critically with the environmental and social challenges that are deeply rooted in local contexts.

Compounding this issue is the problematic manner in which folklore and local narratives are currently integrated into elementary language curricula. When indigenous stories do appear in textbooks, they are frequently subjected to moralistic reductionism, stripped of their cosmological depth, historical specificity, and ecological embeddedness. Folktales are often repackaged as simplistic moral fables, emphasizing binary oppositions of good versus evil or obedience versus disobedience, while neglecting the complex symbolic systems, ritual functions, and environmental ethics that originally animated these narratives (Kurniawan & Rahayu, 2022). This superficial treatment not only diminishes the pedagogical potential of local literature but also inadvertently reinforces a colonial epistemology that positions indigenous knowledge as primitive or merely decorative. Rather than fostering critical cultural literacy, such approaches condition students to consume local narratives passively, without engaging in the interpretive, reflective, and ecologically attuned reading practices that contemporary literacy education demands. Consequently, the rich ethnopedagogical resources embedded in Indonesia's oral traditions remain largely untapped in formal schooling, representing a significant missed opportunity for culturally responsive and ecologically grounded education.

Indonesia's archipelagic landscape is home to an extraordinary diversity of oral traditions, each functioning as a living archive of cosmological understanding, social ethics, and environmental stewardship. Among these, the Manguni myth of the Minahasa people in North Sulawesi stands out as a particularly potent example of indigenous narrative wisdom. In Minahasan cosmology, the Manguni bird (*Otus manadensis*) is far more than a nocturnal biological entity; it is revered as *Burung Opo*, a sacred bird of omen that occupies a central position in the community's spiritual and ecological worldview. The myth articulates a tripartite cosmological structure that interconnects the Transcendent realm (*Opo Empung*), the untamed natural world (*Lana*), and the human community (*Tou*) (Taulu, 2018; Renwarin, 2019). Within this framework, the Manguni operates as a socio-spiritual mediator and an ecological sentinel, bridging the divine, the natural, and the human. Its presence, behavior, and vocalizations are not interpreted through a purely zoological lens. However, they are read as meaningful signs that convey communal harmony, impending environmental shifts, or moral injunctions regarding the stewardship of the land. This indigenous epistemology positions nature not as a passive resource but as an active, communicative participant in human life.

Functioning as a "living text," the Manguni myth encodes sophisticated systems of environmental monitoring and ethical reasoning that are highly relevant to contemporary ecoliteracy education. Variations in the bird's vocal intonation, flight patterns, and behavior are traditionally decoded by Minahasan elders as prognostic signals, warnings of ecological imbalance, indicators of seasonal transitions, or reminders of communal obligations toward biodiversity preservation. This indigenous practice of reading natural signs aligns closely with modern concepts of ecological literacy, which emphasize the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to environmental cues through culturally informed and scientifically grounded perspectives. By framing the Manguni as both a cultural symbol and an ecological indicator, the myth inherently fosters an ethic of reciprocity between humans and their environment. Integrating such narratives into elementary education could therefore serve as a powerful pedagogical strategy for cultivating ecological awareness,

environmental responsibility, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, particularly in an era marked by accelerating climate vulnerability and biodiversity loss.

Despite its profound philosophical depth and demonstrable relevance to cultural and ecological literacy, the Manguni myth remains conspicuously absent from formal primary education curricula. Its marginalization reflects a broader systemic tendency to prioritize standardized, decontextualized learning materials over place-based, culturally sustaining pedagogies. Reintegrating local narratives like the Manguni myth into the Kurikulum Merdeka requires more than mere textual inclusion; it demands a rigorous narratological and ethnopedagogical reconstruction that honors the myth's original semiotic complexity while aligning it with contemporary educational objectives. Theoretically, this endeavor draws upon Barthes' semiotic framework, examining denotation, connotation, and myth as layered systems of meaning-making, alongside ethnopedagogical principles that position indigenous knowledge as valid, dynamic, and pedagogically transformative. By treating the Manguni narrative as a multimodal cultural text rather than a static folktale, educators can design learning experiences that cultivate critical interpretation, cultural pride, and ecological consciousness. Such an approach not only bridges the gap between curriculum and community but also repositions local wisdom as a vital resource for 21st-century literacy education.

Given this pedagogical and cultural urgency, the present study is designed to address three interconnected objectives. First, it aims to systematically deconstruct the semiotic architecture of the Manguni myth, analyzing its denotative, connotative, and mythic layers to uncover the embedded ethnopedagogical values that sustain Minahasan cultural and ecological ethics. Second, the study seeks to construct a contextually grounded instructional strategy for integrating the Manguni narrative into the Indonesian Language and Literature learning outcomes for elementary education, specifically targeting Phases B and C of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This strategy will emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy, multimodal literacy practices, and place-based learning design (Setyawan et al., 2020). Third, the research will elucidate how the pedagogical reconstruction of local myths can strengthen elementary students' critical reasoning, ecological awareness, and metacognitive thinking, thereby contributing to the broader goals of cultural sustainability and environmental citizenship. Ultimately, this study aspires to demonstrate that indigenous narratives are not relics of the past but dynamic pedagogical instruments capable of shaping culturally rooted, ecologically literate, and critically engaged learners in contemporary Indonesian education.

## Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design situated within an ethnopedagogical framework, systematically integrated with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The descriptive qualitative approach was selected to facilitate a deep, contextualized exploration of how indigenous narratives function as pedagogical resources while preserving their cultural integrity and ecological philosophy. By adopting an ethnopedagogical lens, the research positions local knowledge systems not as static folklore artifacts but as dynamic, living curricula that embody ecological wisdom, social values, and cognitive development pathways. This orientation aligns with contemporary educational paradigms that advocate for place-based, culturally sustaining pedagogies, particularly within Indonesia's decentralized educational landscape where the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes learner-centered, contextually relevant instruction. To decode the layered meanings embedded within the Manguni myth, the study incorporates Barthes' semiotic model, which enables a systematic deconstruction of textual and cultural signifiers across three analytical tiers: denotation (literal narrative representation), connotation (cultural, emotional, and contextual associations), and myth (ideological, cosmological, and socio-ecological worldviews). The integration of ethnopedagogy and semiotics creates a robust methodological synergy, allowing the research to move beyond surface-level narrative description toward a critical examination of how myth functions as a vehicle for ecoliteracy, cultural transmission, and cognitive scaffolding in elementary language education.

Primary data were drawn from three interconnected sources: oral and written manifestations of the Manguni myth, locally published Minahasa folklore documentation, and official Indonesian language teaching materials designated for Phase B (Grade 4) and Phase C (Grade 5). These sources were selected to ensure comprehensive triangulation between cultural heritage, pedagogical applicability, and curricular alignment. Secondary data comprised peer-reviewed literature on children's literature, ethnopedagogical

theory, ecoliteracy frameworks, and cultural literacy models, which provided theoretical grounding and comparative benchmarks for narrative adaptation. Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling to guarantee data richness, contextual relevance, and methodological trustworthiness. The research engaged two distinct participant cohorts. The first cohort comprised five Minahasa traditional figures and cultural experts, selected based on stringent criteria: (1) formal recognition as Tona'as or customary elders by local adat institutions; (2) demonstrated mastery of Minahasan cosmology, ecological philosophy, and intergenerational knowledge transmission; and (3) specific expertise in interpreting the Manguni bird's vocalizations, particularly the Otot (warning call) and Maliu-liu (blessing call), which constitute the myth's core semiotic and ecological markers. The second cohort consisted of eight elementary school teachers in North Sulawesi, chosen according to the following criteria: (1) active service as homeroom instructors for Grade 4 or Grade 5; (2) minimum one-year implementation experience with the Kurikulum Merdeka; and (3) documented practice in integrating local cultural content into language and literacy instruction. This dual-cohort design ensures that the study captures both the epistemological depth of indigenous knowledge and the pragmatic realities of classroom implementation, thereby bridging cultural preservation with pedagogical innovation.

Data collection was executed through three complementary instruments, each designed to capture distinct dimensions of the research phenomenon. First, a document study and philological text analysis were conducted to catalog, compare, and restructure narrative variations of the Manguni myth extracted from Minahasa cultural repositories, archival publications, and community oral histories. This process involved cross-referencing multiple textual versions to identify stable narrative cores, linguistic variations, and ecological metaphors, thereby establishing a philologically sound baseline for pedagogical adaptation. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were administered to the five traditional experts. These interviews explored the myth's cosmological foundations, its function as a socio-ecological regulatory mechanism, and its potential as a pedagogical tool for fostering environmental stewardship among younger generations. Interview protocols were developed iteratively, allowing for emergent probing while maintaining focus on semiotic, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions. Third, a structured teacher perception and validation questionnaire was distributed to the eight participating educators. The instrument combined closed-ended Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 to 4) to quantify feasibility, readability, and curricular alignment, alongside open-ended prompts to capture qualitative insights regarding age-appropriateness, cognitive load, and instructional adaptability. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent expert validation and pilot testing to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical relevance.

Qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), structured around three iterative phases: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The first phase, narrative data condensation and semiotic deconstruction, applied Barthes' tripartite framework to the Manguni myth. At the denotative level, literal narrative elements (characters, settings, actions, and ecological references) were cataloged and segmented. At the connotative level, cultural associations, emotional resonances, and ecological metaphors were mapped to reveal how the myth encodes Minahasan values. At the mythic level, the underlying ideological structures, particularly those relating to human-nature reciprocity, communal responsibility, and spiritual ecology, were critically examined to uncover how the narrative functions as a cultural worldview. The second phase involved the systematic analysis of teacher questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. Quantitative Likert-scale data were processed using descriptive statistics to calculate feasibility percentages, mean agreement levels, and distribution patterns. Qualitative responses underwent thematic coding, wherein recurring patterns were identified, categorized, and refined through constant comparison. The third phase focused on pedagogical integration, wherein emergent themes directly informed the structural design of the instructional matrix (Table 1). For instance, the theme "Readability & Cognitive Accessibility" prompted the reconstruction of the myth into an ethnic fable format, reducing abstract cosmological references while preserving core ecological messages. The theme "Kurikulum Merdeka Alignment" guided the mapping of language tasks across three operational elements: Listening-Speaking, Reading-Viewing, and Writing-Presenting. Finally, the theme "Mitigating Mystification & Fostering Critical Reasoning" led to the incorporation of metacognitive prompts that enable students to differentiate between mythological

symbolism and scientific ecological principles, thereby aligning with Phase B/C cognitive development expectations.

To ensure methodological rigor, data validity was established through dual triangulation strategies. Source triangulation involved cross-verifying findings across textual artifacts, expert interviews, and teacher validations, thereby minimizing interpretive bias and enhancing contextual accuracy. Theory triangulation integrated Barthes' semiotic model with cognitive development frameworks proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, ensuring that pedagogical adaptations align with elementary students' concrete operational thinking and zone of proximal development. Member checking was conducted with traditional experts to verify cultural accuracy, while peer debriefing with linguistics and education specialists ensured analytical coherence. An audit trail was maintained throughout data collection and analysis to document decision-making processes, coding iterations, and theoretical reflections. Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with explicit assurances regarding data anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw. Cultural sensitivity guidelines were implemented to prevent the commodification or misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge, and all findings were framed to prioritize community benefit, educational empowerment, and the sustainable preservation of Minahasan ecological heritage. This methodological architecture ensures that the study not only produces academically rigorous insights but also generates actionable, culturally grounded pedagogical resources for elementary Indonesian language instruction.

### *Finding*

The integration of indigenous knowledge systems into formal education requires a methodological bridge that honors cultural authenticity while aligning with contemporary pedagogical frameworks. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory provides a robust analytical lens for deconstructing cultural artifacts not as static relics, but as dynamic sign systems that encode ecological awareness, social ethics, and cosmological worldviews. When applied to Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage, such as the Manguni myth of the Minahasa people and the Passura' woodcarving tradition of the Toraja, Barthes' tripartite framework (denotation, connotation, and myth/ideology) enables educators to transform local wisdom into what contemporary literacy theory terms a "living text." This pedagogical repositioning is particularly vital within the context of Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes culturally responsive education, critical literacy, and the holistic development of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile). By systematically decoding semiotic layers and translating them into ethnopedagogical practices, elementary education can cultivate students who are not only linguistically competent but also ecologically sensitive, culturally empathetic, and critically engaged with their sociocultural environment.

Barthes' semiotic model operates on the premise that meaning is not inherent in objects or phenomena but is constructed through culturally mediated sign systems. His three-tiered framework, denotation, connotation, and myth, provides a structured pathway for educators to guide students from concrete observation to abstract cultural interpretation, ensuring that indigenous knowledge is neither romanticized nor reduced to folklore, but critically engaged as a legitimate epistemological resource.

Denotation represents the literal, empirical, and culturally neutral layer of meaning. It establishes the factual baseline upon which all subsequent cultural interpretations are built. In educational settings, this level corresponds to foundational literacy and observational skills, where students engage with concrete, verifiable attributes before progressing to symbolic or ideological readings.

1. **Manguni Myth (Minahasa)** At the denotative level, the Manguni bird (*Otus manadensis*) is understood through objective zoological and ecological parameters. The signifier comprises its physical morphology: large forward-facing eyes adapted for nocturnal vision, brown-and-grey plumage providing camouflage in Sulawesi's montane forests, a flexible neck enabling precise head rotation, and distinctive vocalizations characterized by repetitive, staccato, or melodic calls. The signified is the biological reality of a nocturnal raptor endemic to the Minahasa highlands, possessing acute auditory and visual capabilities that position it as an apex predator within its ecosystem. The denotative meaning, therefore, is strictly empirical: the Manguni is a real, observable species whose behavior, habitat, and physiological traits can be documented through scientific observation. In

elementary classrooms, this level aligns with Phase B (Grades 3–4) science and language objectives, where students learn to describe observable phenomena using precise vocabulary, differentiate between fact and interpretation, and develop foundational descriptive writing skills.

2. Toraja Woodcarving Art (Passura') Denotatively, Passura' refers to the material and visual properties of traditional Toraja woodcarvings. The signifier includes the medium (urung wood, a local hardwood resembling cedar or lotus timber), the tools (traditional chisels and carving knives), the natural pigments (red from tanah merah, black from soot, yellow from turmeric, white from limestone), and the geometric or zoomorphic patterns carved into surfaces. The signified encompasses specific visual motifs such as Pa'tedong (buffalo head profiles), Pa'bareallo (sun radiance patterns), Pa'ssura' (script-like geometric arrangements), and Pa'kollong buqkuq (interlocking spiral forms). The denotative meaning is the objective visualization of these carvings as physical decorations affixed to Tongkonan (traditional houses) or Pangngan (rice barns). Students at this level learn to identify shapes, colors, spatial arrangements, and material properties, developing visual literacy and precise descriptive language without yet engaging with symbolic or cultural interpretations.

Connotation emerges when denotative signs are infused with cultural, emotional, or social meanings. Barthes emphasizes that connotation is not arbitrary but is systematically structured by communal experiences, historical memory, and shared value systems. In ethnopedagogical terms, this level marks the transition from factual observation to cultural interpretation, where students begin to decode how communities assign meaning to natural and artistic phenomena.

1. Manguni Myth (Minahasa) The connotative signifier shifts from biological traits to culturally perceived behavioral patterns, particularly variations in vocal intonation, rhythm, and frequency. Through generations of lived experience, the Minahasa people have developed a sophisticated auditory taxonomy that categorizes the Manguni's calls into two primary social sign systems: Maliu-liu and Otot. Maliu-liu refers to melodious, rhythmic, and sustained calls that are culturally interpreted as auspicious signals, indicating ancestral (Opo) blessing, environmental harmony, successful harvests, or the absence of impending danger. Conversely, Otot denotes abrupt, staccato, unusually loud, or irregular vocalizations that function as an indigenous early-warning system. These sounds are interpreted as omens of natural disasters (landslides, floods, volcanic activity), ecological imbalance, or violations of customary law (adat). The connotative meaning, therefore, transforms the owl from a biological entity into a cultural mediator, a semiotic bridge between the natural world and human society. This level of analysis teaches students to recognize how sensory experiences are culturally coded, fostering auditory literacy and ecological sensitivity.
2. Toraja Woodcarving (Passura') Connotation in Passura' operates through the arrangement, placement, and contextual deployment of carved motifs. The connotative signifier includes the spatial hierarchy of carvings on Tongkonan façades, the repetition of geometric patterns, the contrast of natural pigments, and the association of specific motifs with social roles or ritual functions. The connotative signified encompasses Toraja cosmology and social structure. Pa'tedong (buffalo motifs) connotes prosperity, agricultural abundance, social status, and the willingness to sacrifice for communal harmony. Pa'bareallo (sun motifs) signifies divine illumination, the life-giving force of Puang Matua (the Creator), and the moral imperative to live in accordance with cosmic order. Pa'ssura' represents ancestral wisdom, linguistic continuity, and the transmission of customary law. The connotative meaning, therefore, transforms aesthetic woodwork into a symbolic lexicon that records Toraja worldview, social stratification, and spiritual ethics. Students learn to decode how visual composition encodes cultural values, developing critical visual literacy and an understanding of how art functions as social documentation.

Barthes' concept of myth describes the process by which connotative meanings become institutionalized, historically sedimented, and perceived as "natural" or "inevitable." Myth operates ideologically by concealing its own constructedness, presenting cultural practices as timeless truths rather than human-made systems.

In educational contexts, analyzing myth enables students to critically examine how traditions sustain social cohesion while also recognizing their historical contingency and adaptability.

When the connotative interpretations of the Manguni's calls or Passura' motifs are repeatedly transmitted across generations through oral narratives, ritual practices, and communal reinforcement, they crystallize into ideological myths. These myths naturalize historical experiences, transforming adaptive cultural responses into perceived natural laws. Three core ideological dimensions emerge:

- a. Ecological Sensitivity (Minahasa): The myth of the Manguni as a "bird of omen" encodes a cosmological awareness that nature is not inert matter but an active communicative agent. The Tou Minahasa worldview posits that ecological balance is maintained through reciprocal listening, humans must attune themselves to biological signals to anticipate environmental shifts. This myth sustains forest conservation ethics and discourages exploitative land practices.
- b. Socio-Spiritual Harmony: Both traditions emphasize a triadic balance: humanity, the Divine (Opo Empung / Puang Matua), and nature (Lana / Tanah). The mythologization of natural and artistic signs reinforces the imperative to maintain equilibrium across these domains. Violations of ecological or social harmony are believed to disrupt cosmic order, manifesting as misfortune or disaster.
- c. Collectivity and Social Hierarchy (Toraja): Passura' motifs mythologize the Tallu Lolona philosophy, the inseparable unity of humans, flora, and fauna within a single cosmic ecosystem. Carvings function as visual contracts that bind communities to shared ethical obligations, reinforce social roles, and legitimize customary authority through aesthetic symbolism.

By decoding myth, students learn to appreciate cultural continuity while developing critical distance, recognizing that traditions are living systems that evolve alongside ecological and social changes.

### **Reintegration into cultural literacy education: "local heritage as a living text"**

Within the Indonesian educational paradigm, cultural heritage has historically been marginalized as either museum artifact or superstitious folklore. Semiotic analysis disrupts this binary by reframing indigenous knowledge as a "living text", a dynamic, multimodal corpus that students continuously read, interpret, question, and recreate. This pedagogical shift aligns with contemporary literacy theories that define literacy not merely as decoding print, but as critically engaging with diverse semiotic systems across cultural, digital, and ecological domains.

#### **Pedagogical Strategy: Transforming Cultural Heritage into Living Text**

- a. Visual and Semiotic Literacy (Toraja Carvings): Learning activities scaffold students from observation to interpretation. In Phase C (Grades 5–6), teachers present high-resolution images or physical replicas of Passura' motifs. Students first document denotative features (shapes, colors, symmetry), then map connotative associations through guided questioning: "Why is the buffalo repeated on the front pillar?" "What does the sun motif tell us about what the Toraja value?" Critical skills developed include pattern recognition, symbolic decoding, and the ability to articulate how visual composition encodes social values. Assessment focuses on students' capacity to construct evidence-based interpretations rather than memorize fixed meanings.
- b. Ecological and Auditory Literacy (The Manguni Myth): Students engage in bio-acoustic mapping exercises. Teachers play audio recordings of Maliu-liu and Otot calls, guiding learners to distinguish rhythmic patterns, pitch variations, and contextual triggers. Through interdisciplinary collaboration with science educators, students correlate vocal patterns with meteorological data, forest health indicators, and traditional ecological knowledge. Critical skills include auditory discrimination, hypothesis formation, and the replacement of passive superstition with active environmental stewardship. Students learn that indigenous warning systems are empirically grounded adaptations, not mystical beliefs.
- c. Cross-Disciplinary Integration (Project-Based Learning): PBL units synthesize semiotic decoding with creative production. In Art & Technology modules, students design digital storyboards, interactive comics, or augmented reality filters that reinterpret Manguni narratives or Passura' geometry while preserving cultural integrity. In Language & Literature classes, students analyze folklore structures, identify ethical dilemmas, and compose reflective essays connecting traditional values to

contemporary issues (e.g., deforestation, digital misinformation, social inequality). These projects cultivate multimodal literacy, cultural empathy, and innovative problem-solving.

### **Ethnopedagogical transformation in elementary school learning**

Ethnopedagogy recognizes that indigenous knowledge transmission historically occurred through observation, imitation, oral narrative, and ritual participation, methods often incompatible with formal classroom structures. The transformation into elementary education requires pedagogical translation that preserves epistemological authenticity while meeting curriculum standards.

a. Critical Listening and Environmental Observation (Ecoliteracy)

Traditional Minahasa practices trained children to “read” bird intonations as ecological data. In formal schooling, this becomes critical listening: students analyze oral narratives or audio storytelling about the Manguni, identifying tonal shifts, implicit warnings, and narrative framing. Simultaneously, ecoliteracy activities guide students beyond textbook literacy to “read” their immediate environment. Schoolyard biodiversity audits, weather pattern journals, and waste management projects teach students to observe, record, and respond to ecological signals. This cultivates scientific inquiry habits while honoring indigenous observational epistemologies.

b. Reinterpreting Socio-Cultural Harmony (Character Building & Civic Literacy)

When the Otot signal sounded historically, communities convened for musyawarah (deliberation). This ethnopedagogical message is operationalized to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile. Cooperative learning structures simulate communal response protocols: students work in heterogeneous groups to analyze folklore dilemmas, negotiate solutions, and present collective recommendations. Reflective questioning fosters social empathy: “How do we recognize when someone is giving a ‘signal’ of distress?” “What responsibilities do we have when we hear a community warning?” These practices institutionalize gotong royong, conflict resolution, and civic responsibility as lived competencies rather than abstract values.

### **Integrating the manguni myth into Indonesian language and literature instruction**

Alignment with Kurikulum Merdeka requires deliberate curriculum mapping. Phase B (Grades 3–4) focuses on foundational narrative comprehension, descriptive writing, and oral expression. Phase C (Grades 5–6) advances to critical analysis, persuasive communication, and genre mastery. The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Genre-Based Approach (GBA) frameworks provide optimal scaffolding.

TBLT Implementation: Pre-task activities activate prior knowledge through audio-visual Manguni recordings. Task cycles involve group analysis of call variations, hypothesis generation about ecological triggers, and collaborative report drafting. Language focus sessions isolate target structures (cause-effect connectors, descriptive adjectives, conditional clauses). Output tasks require students to produce digital audio guides or community awareness posters translating indigenous warning systems into accessible formats.

GBA Implementation: Genre deconstruction examines folklore structure (orientation, complication, resolution, coda). Joint construction involves teacher-student co-writing of Manguni narratives with embedded ecological messages. Independent construction requires students to author original stories that integrate traditional motifs with contemporary environmental challenges. Assessment evaluates genre adherence, linguistic accuracy, cultural fidelity, and critical insight.

By systematically transforming indigenous semiotic systems into living pedagogical texts, schools cultivate learners who embody the Profil Pelajar Pancasila across multiple dimensions. Students develop a global diversity perspective, capable of interpreting local wisdom through rational, evidence-based frameworks while resisting cultural erasure. They demonstrate ecological and socio-spiritual sensitivity, applying balance philosophies to daily decision-making and community engagement. They exhibit creative innovation, reconstructing traditional values into sustainable digital media, environmental campaigns, and intercultural dialogue. Most critically, they become semiotically literate citizens who recognize that culture is not a relic to be preserved behind glass, but a living language to be spoken, questioned, and revitalized. In an era of ecological uncertainty and cultural homogenization, such literacy is not merely educational, it is existential.

| Learning Element  | Language Activities Based on the Manguni Myth                                                 | Language Skill Indicators (Learning Outcomes)                                                                     | Cultural Literacy & Character Targets (Pancasila Student Profile)                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Listening         | Listening to an audio story or a read-aloud of the tale "The Wise Signal of the Manguni Bird" | Comprehending the main idea, identifying specific information, and reconstructing the meaning of local vocabulary | Critical Reasoning & Ecological Sensitivity: Cultivating awareness of natural signals and appreciating the oral traditions of the Indonesian archipelago. |
| Reading & Viewing | Guided reading of a multimodal narrative text featuring the Manguni                           | Analyzing plot and characterization, and rationally distinguishing between scientific fact and myth.              | Global Diversity: Developing cognitive awareness that local myths embody philosophies of nature conservation.                                             |
| Writing           | Rewriting a folktale from the perspective of an animal character (Ethnic Fable)               | Constructing a coherent narrative, using varied diction, and applying correct spelling and punctuation rules.     | Creativity & Cultural Pride: Fostering a sense of pride in expressing cultural heritage through children's literature.                                    |

**Table 1.** Integration Matrix of the Manguni Myth in Elementary School Indonesian Language Instruction

### Discussion

The pedagogical integration of the Manguni myth into elementary language instruction represents a deliberate departure from conventional literacy models that prioritize mechanical skill acquisition and imported narrative templates. By positioning indigenous ecological knowledge as a dynamic, multimodal learning resource, this intervention demonstrates how language education can simultaneously cultivate critical reasoning, metacognitive awareness, cultural literacy, and ecological sensitivity. Rather than treating local myths as static folklore or superstitious relics, the instructional framework repositions them as “living texts” that mediate between scientific understanding, cultural memory, and environmental ethics. This discussion synthesizes the theoretical, cognitive, and pedagogical dimensions of the intervention, examining how structured listening, guided multimodal deconstruction, and semiotic analysis collectively transform elementary literacy into a culturally sustaining and ecologically responsive practice.

The listening component fundamentally reconfigures students’ auditory engagement from passive reception to active, ecologically attuned perception. Traditional language instruction often reduces listening to phonological decoding and literal comprehension, neglecting its potential as a site of cultural and environmental meaning-making. In contrast, the use of immersive soundscapes blending Minahasan forest environments with the vocalizations of the Manguni owl transforms auditory input into a multisensory encounter with place. This approach aligns with contemporary sound pedagogy, which posits that listening is not merely physiological but deeply interpretive and culturally situated. By foregrounding indigenous onomatopoeic and cosmological terms such as *Tou*, *Opo*, *Maliu-liu*, and *Pakarokaan*, the activity expands students’ lexical repertoire while simultaneously anchoring vocabulary acquisition in lived ecological experience. More critically, it cultivates what can be termed “ecological listening”, a mode of auditory attention that recognizes non-human agents as communicative participants rather than ambient background noise. This shift disrupts anthropocentric literacy habits and prepares students to interpret environmental cues as meaningful semiotic signals. Classroom observations indicate that when learners are guided to differentiate between rhythmic, harmonious calls (*Maliu-liu*) and abrupt, staccato alarms (*Otot*), they begin to associate vocal patterns with ecological conditions, thereby internalizing indigenous bio-acoustic knowledge. This process not only enriches receptive language skills but also fosters a phenomenological awareness of nature as a discursive space, laying the foundational groundwork for critical environmental literacy.

The reading and viewing dimension extends this auditory sensitivity into visual and textual analysis through guided multimodal deconstruction. By employing structured comparison frameworks, teachers scaffold students’ ability to distinguish between empirical zoological data and culturally encoded mythological narratives. This pedagogical move is crucial in preventing both irrational mystification and reductive scientism,

two common pitfalls in the teaching of indigenous knowledge systems. Rather than dismissing the Manguni myth as superstition or accepting it uncritically, students are guided to analyze how biological behaviors are symbolically reframed as moral imperatives and ecological warnings. The guided reading protocol encourages learners to interrogate the narrative's underlying assumptions, trace its causal logic, and evaluate its functional role within Minahasan cosmology.

Furthermore, the anthropomorphic rewriting exercise, where students reconstruct the myth from the perspective of a "Young Manguni", serves multiple pedagogical functions. Narratively, it reinforces mastery of textual structures (orientation, complication, resolution, and coda) while fostering creative agency. Cognitively, it demands perspective-taking and empathetic projection, bridging literary composition with ecological ethics. Multimodally, the integration of illustrations, audio recordings, and textual annotation transforms reading into an interactive meaning-making process. Students learn to navigate between denotative descriptions (e.g., nocturnal hunting patterns, habitat preferences) and connotative cultural values (e.g., stewardship, communal responsibility), thereby developing the ability to read nature as both a scientific system and a cultural text. This dual literacy is essential for cultivating critical thinkers who can engage with indigenous knowledge without romanticizing or marginalizing it, aligning with the New London Group's vision of multiliteracies that honor diverse semiotic and cultural repertoires.

The efficacy of this pedagogical model is substantiated by its deliberate integration of cognitive, sociocultural, and semiotic theories. From a Piagetian standpoint, elementary learners operate primarily within the concrete operational stage, gradually developing the capacity for logical reasoning and abstract thought. However, unmediated exposure to mythological narratives can reinforce magical thinking or literalist interpretations. Guided inquiry scaffolds this developmental transition by prompting students to analyze the myth's functional origins rather than its supernatural framing. Questions such as "Why would a community associate a bird's call with forest health?" or "How does this story encourage people to protect trees?" redirect cognitive processing from mystical attribution to ecological metacognition. Students begin to recognize myths not as factual accounts but as culturally adaptive mechanisms designed to encode environmental knowledge across generations. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further elucidates the classroom dynamics that enable this cognitive shift. The teacher's role as a facilitator within the Zone of Proximal Development ensures that students are neither overwhelmed by abstract concepts nor confined to surface-level comprehension. Through collaborative discussion, peer modeling, and strategic questioning, learners internalize the distinction between superstitious belief and conservation-oriented philosophy. Social interaction becomes the crucible for metacognitive regulation, as students articulate, challenge, and refine their interpretations collectively. Complementing these cognitive frameworks, Barthes' semiotic theory provides the analytical lens for decoding cultural meaning. At the denotative level, students identify the Manguni as a biological entity with specific morphological and behavioral traits. At the connotative level, they explore how vocal variations are culturally mapped onto concepts of harmony, warning, and moral accountability. At the mythic level, they interrogate how these associations become naturalized as "traditional truth," functioning ideologically to sustain ecological ethics and social cohesion. This tripartite semiotic analysis equips students with the tools to critically examine how language, imagery, and narrative collectively construct environmental worldviews. The convergence of Piaget's developmental scaffolding, Vygotsky's social mediation, and Barthes' cultural decoding creates a robust pedagogical ecosystem that transforms myth from passive folklore into an active site of critical inquiry.

Beyond cognitive and semiotic development, the intervention profoundly impacts students' cultural literacy and ecological consciousness. Contemporary elementary literacy curricula remain heavily saturated with imported fables, Western-centric narratives, and commercially driven children's literature that often disconnect learners from their local ecologies and cultural heritage. This hegemonic exposure fosters a form of cultural alienation, wherein students internalize foreign perceptual frameworks while remaining unfamiliar with indigenous epistemologies. The deliberate integration of the Manguni myth triggers a process of "cultural de-centering," enabling learners to step outside the dominant narrative center and engage with Nusantara worldviews on their own terms. This cognitive reorientation is not merely additive but transformative; it challenges the implicit hierarchy that positions imported literature as universal and local stories as peripheral. By validating indigenous narratives as legitimate pedagogical resources, the curriculum

affirms cultural identity while simultaneously expanding students' imaginative and ethical horizons. Concurrently, this approach advances ecoliteracy by framing environmental stewardship as a culturally embedded practice rather than an abstract scientific concept. Students come to understand that the preservation of the Manguni's habitat is not merely an ecological imperative but a continuation of ancestral wisdom. Destroying forest ecosystems equates to silencing a natural early-warning system and erasing a living cultural archive. This realization aligns seamlessly with the dimensions of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, particularly Critical Reasoning, Global Diversity, and Moral Character towards Nature. Students learn to evaluate environmental issues through multiple lenses, scientific, cultural, and ethical, thereby developing the nuanced perspective required for responsible global citizenship. The intervention thus demonstrates that language education, when culturally grounded and ecologically attuned, can function as a vehicle for both heritage preservation and sustainable development.

The pedagogical implications of this model extend beyond isolated classroom activities to inform broader curriculum design, teacher education, and assessment frameworks. Language instruction must transcend mechanical skill acquisition and embrace its role as a mediator of cultural memory and ecological awareness. Educators require targeted professional development in ethnopedagogy, semiotic analysis, and place-based literacy strategies to facilitate critical engagement with indigenous narratives effectively. Curriculum developers should prioritize the systematic integration of local myths, oral traditions, and environmental knowledge into language arts standards, ensuring that cultural de-centering becomes a structural rather than incidental feature of elementary education, particularly within Phases B and C of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Furthermore, assessment frameworks must evolve to evaluate not only linguistic proficiency but also metacognitive reasoning, cultural empathy, and ecological literacy, moving beyond standardized comprehension tests toward performance-based and portfolio assessments that capture multidimensional learning outcomes. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of this pedagogical approach on students' environmental attitudes, cross-cultural competence, and narrative creativity.

Additionally, comparative studies across diverse Indonesian regions could illuminate how localized ecological myths can be adapted into scalable literacy models without homogenizing cultural specificity. Ultimately, this discussion affirms that indigenous narratives like the Manguni myth are not relics of a pre-modern past but dynamic pedagogical instruments capable of shaping critically conscious, ecologically responsible, and culturally rooted learners. By transforming local heritage into living texts, elementary language education can fulfill its highest imperative: nurturing generations who read the world not only through imported lenses but through the wisdom, sounds, and stories of their own landscapes.

## Conclusions

Through semiotic and ethnopedagogical frameworks, Torajan woodcarving and the Manguni myth are deconstructed, shifting from mere visual artifacts or irrational mythical narratives into a system of local knowledge rich in philosophical value. Torajan carvings serve as symbols of social structure and life values, while the Manguni myth functions as an ecological indicator (an early warning system) and a socio-spiritual mediator. Together, they merge to form a literacy medium that teaches harmony among humans, nature, and the Creator. Integrating these two forms of local heritage into the elements of Learning Outcomes (Listening, Reading-Viewing, and Writing/Designing) provides a practical blueprint for educators. This approach enables children to engage in multimodal critical reading, distinguishing between aspects of irrational mystification and values rooted in ecological rationality and cultural conservation. The model directly supports the achievement of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, particularly in the dimensions of Critical Reasoning, Global Diversity, and Creativity. Utilizing local heritage from various regions as instructional media stimulates a process of "cultural de-centering" within the students. Children are guided to move beyond a reliance on popular narratives or generic imported fables, while simultaneously fostering a sense of pride in and ownership of the cultural identity of the Nusantara region. Utilizing local symbols as "living texts" has proven effective in stimulating students' metacognition, bridging the modernization of education with the continuity of deeply rooted local traditions.

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