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Enhancing Eco-literacy of Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMW) through Interactive Storybook Media: A Border Learning Strategy for Environmental Sustainability Awareness at Entikong CBP

Peningkatan Eko-literasi Anak Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) melalui Media Buku Cerita Interaktif: Strategi Pembelajaran Perbatasan untuk Kesadaran Keberlanjutan Lingkungan di PLBN Entikong

Nina Yulianti[a,b*], Fengky Florante Adji[b], Febrina Natalia[c], Wilson[a], & Firliaty[a]

[a]*University of Palangka Raya, Jalan Tunjung Nyaho, Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia*
[b] *Attache of Education and Culture, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Manila, Salcedo Street, Metro Manila, Philippines*
[c] *Regional Library of Central Kalimantan, Jl. AIS Nasution No.11 Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia*

Abstract

Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMW) in the Sarawak, Malaysia border region face complex educational and environmental challenges. This community service program aimed to enhance environmental eco-literacy among IMW children at the Entikong–Tebedu Cross-Border Post through interactive media-based sustainability education. The implementation method comprised three stages: (1) preparation and development of the educational storybook "Lets Learn Soil, Water and Air Pollution!", (2) interactive educational workshops and field activities, and (3) evaluation using pre-test and post-test assessments. The results demonstrated a 35.5% increase in environmental awareness, with the average comprehension score rising from 54.5 (moderate) in the pre-test to 90.0 (excellent) in the post-test. Furthermore, the program facilitated a formal partnership agreement between Universitas Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan and Universitas Panca Bhakti, West Kalimantan to support ongoing border education. This initiative confirms that context-aware and interactive educational approaches effectively foster environmental stewardship among border children.

Abstrak

Anak-anak Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) di wilayah perbatasan Sarawak, Malaysia menghadapi tantangan pendidikan dan lingkungan yang kompleks. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan ekoliterasi anak-anak PMI di Pos Lintas Batas Negara (PLBN) Entikong–Tebedu melalui pendidikan keberlanjutan lingkungan hidup berbasis media interaktif. Metode pelaksanaan ditempuh melalui tiga tahapan: (1) tahap persiapan dan penyusunan buku cerita edukatif "Ayo Belajar Polusi Tanah, Air, dan Udara!", (2) tahap pelaksanaan edukasi interaktif dan praktik lapangan, serta (3) tahap evaluasi menggunakan pre-test dan post-test. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan peningkatan pemahaman ekoliterasi anak-anak PMI sebesar 35,5%, di mana rerata skor pemahaman meningkat dari 54,5 (kategori sedang) pada pre-test menjadi 90,0 (kategori sangat baik) pada post-test. Selain itu, program ini memfasilitasi penandatanganan Perjanjian Kerja Sama (PKS) antara Universitas Palangka Raya dan Universitas Panca Bhakti untuk mendukung keberlanjutan edukasi perbatasan. Kegiatan ini membuktikan bahwa pendekatan edukasi bernuansa lokal dan interaktif efektif dalam membangun kesadaran lingkungan pada anak-anak perbatasan.

Keywords: Environmental Education, Cross-Border Post, Indonesia Migrant Worker, Children, Sustainability

* Corresponding author:
E-mail address: nyulianti@agr.upr.ac.id

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1. Introduction

The land border between Indonesia and Malaysia in West Kalimantan and Sarawak serves as a major gateway connecting the two countries and is among Southeast Asia's busiest cross-border regions. This area facilitates economic and social exchanges and encompasses significant ecological systems, including tropical forests, peatlands, farmland, and transboundary river basins. These ecosystems are increasingly threatened by deforestation, fires, water pollution, biodiversity loss, and plastic waste. Given that environmental challenges in border regions impact both nations, enhancing environmental awareness among local communities, particularly children, is a critical strategy for advancing sustainable development in the region (Dimitrova & Bouloukos, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) residing in plantation settlements in Tebedu, Sarawak, represent one of the most vulnerable populations in the border region. Despite living in ecologically sensitive areas, many of these children lack access to structured environmental education. Their educational opportunities are further constrained by geographic isolation, inadequate facilities, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, and limited availability of contextually relevant educational materials (Effendi & Rahmi, 2024; Wong et al., 2021). In response to these challenges, a community service program was developed to enhance ecological literacy among migrant children and promote sustainable development within border communities.

From the perspective of existing community resources, IMW families generally reside in remote plantation settlements, while their children access education through two pathways. Some children attend Indonesian public elementary schools by crossing the Entikong–Tebedu border daily using Border Pass documents, whereas many others study in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and *Sanggar Bimbingan* established through bilateral cooperation between the Indonesian Government, plantation companies, and local communities (Wong et al., 2021; Yuniarto & Setiawan, 2022). Despite these educational facilities, environmental learning remains largely dependent on conventional classroom instruction, with limited availability of interactive teaching materials, visual learning media, or outdoor learning activities that relate environmental concepts to children's everyday experiences (Ardoin et al., 2020).

From the university perspective, the implementing institution possesses academic expertise in environmental conservation, agrotechnology, biodiversity, and community empowerment. These competencies provide substantial potential to support border communities through community engagement, applied research, and educational innovation. Nevertheless, systematic collaboration between universities and border schools to develop contextual eco-literacy programs for migrant children has remained limited. Effective community–university partnerships require reciprocal collaboration and interventions that respond directly to community needs while integrating academic knowledge into practical solutions (Williamson et al., 2016).

Various initiatives have previously been implemented to improve educational access for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. The Indonesian Government has established Community Learning Centres (CLCs), *Sanggar Bimbingan*, and Sekolah Indonesia Luar Negeri (SILN) to expand access to basic education for migrant children (Jatmika, 2023; Purwanto et al., 2024; Wulan et al., 2023; Purba & Azizah, 2024). These initiatives have significantly improved educational participation; however, they have primarily focused on providing access to formal education and general learning support. Likewise, previous community outreach activities have generally emphasized literacy, character education, or academic tutoring. Interactive eco-literacy programs integrating environmental storytelling, illustrated educational media, biodiversity observation, and outdoor experiential learning have rarely been implemented, particularly for Indonesian migrant children living in the Entikong–Tebedu border region (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2021; Poje et al., 2024; Wulan et al., 2025).

Based on these conditions, this community service activity was designed to strengthen eco-literacy among Indonesian Migrant Worker children through an integrated eco-literacy program (I Made, 2025). The program combines illustrated environmental storybooks, interactive educational games, biodiversity observation, and outdoor environmental demonstrations to encourage children's understanding of local ecosystems and environmentally responsible behavior. At the same time, the program strengthens collaboration between universities, schools, communities, and border institutions as a model of community-engaged higher education. Through this approach, the activity contributes not only to improving ecological literacy among migrant children but also to supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

2. Methods

This community service program employed an integrated, action-oriented framework that combined Community Education, Science and Technology Diffusion, and Training to address the limited availability of environmental learning resources for children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) residing in border areas. Community Education was implemented through interactive educational sessions on soil, water, and air pollution to strengthen participants' foundational environmental literacy or so called eco-literacy (Desmarais, 2024). The Science and Technology Diffusion component involved the development, publication, and distribution of an ISBN-registered interactive storybook entitled *Ayo Belajar Polusi Tanah, Air, dan Udara!,* which was designed as a sustainable environmental learning resource for elementary schools in border communities. Complementing these activities, the Training component provided experiential, field-based learning through outdoor demonstrations that enabled students to identify indicators of water pollution, classify different types of soil waste, and recognize local plant species with conservation value in the Entikong border area.

The program was focused at State Elementary School 03 (SD Negeri 03) Sontas, located in Dusun Sontas, Entikong Village, Entikong District, Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Situated along the Indonesia–Malaysia international border, the school serves children living in frontier communities and provides an appropriate setting for implementing environmental education initiatives in geographically remote areas. The primary educational partner site was SDN 03 Sontas, located approximately 4 to 5 kilometers from the Entikong Cross-Border Post (Pos Lintas Batas Negara / PLBN Entikong).

The participants comprised 20 primary school-aged children from Indonesian Migrant Worker (IMW) families residing in Tebedu, Sarawak, Malaysia, who commute daily across the international border to attend SD Negeri 03 Sontas in Indonesia using the Border Pass (Pas Lintas Batas, PLB). This cross-border student population experiences limited access to formal environmental education because educational services for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysian border areas remain constrained, particularly outside officially recognized Community Learning Centers (CLCs). Consequently, this school represents an important educational hub for supporting environmental literacy among IMW children.

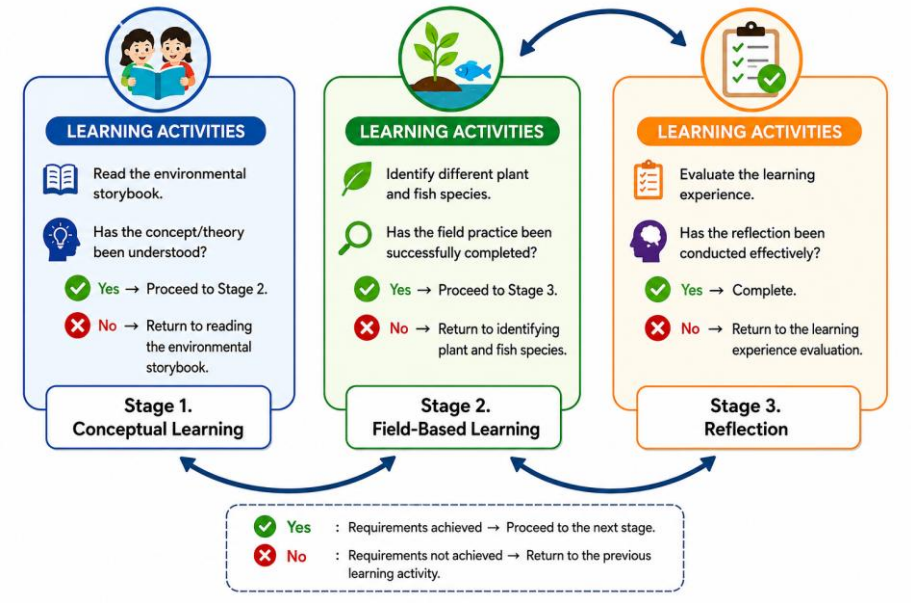

Figure 1. The Stage Experiential Learning Cycle for Improving Eco-Literacy.

The program was implemented through three sequential phases to ensure both immediate educational outcomes and long-term sustainability. The Preparation Phase (January–September 2024) involved drafting the interactive storybook, reviewing and refining its content in collaboration with librarians from the Central Kalimantan Regional Library, obtaining the required administrative and cross-border permits, and producing the final printed version of the learning media. The Implementation Phase, conducted on 9–11 October 2024, began with a baseline environmental literacy (eco-literacy) pre-test, followed by interactive storybook reading sessions, educational quizzes, environmental

puzzles, and field-based learning activities, as illustrated in Figure 1. Students participated in direct observations of local environmental conditions and practiced identifying pollution indicators and native plant species to reinforce conceptual understanding through experiential learning.

The Evaluation and Sustainability Phase, conducted on 11-12 October 2024, assessed learning outcomes by comparing participants' pre-test and post-test scores. To promote long-term program sustainability, a formal Cooperation Agreement (Perjanjian Kerja Sama, PKS) was established between Universitas Palangka Raya and Universitas Panca Bhakti Pontianak, providing an institutional framework for continued collaboration in environmental education and community engagement programs across the Kalimantan border region.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Development and Pedagogical Impact of Interactive Media

As illustrated in Figure 2, the primary tangible output of this community service initiative was the systematic design, refinement, and publication of the ISBN-registered interactive storybook titled "Ayo Belajar Polusi Tanah, Air, dan Udara!" ("Let's Learn About Soil, Water, and Air Pollution!"). To ensure scientific accuracy, pedagogical suitability, and visual appeal for primary school children in border areas, the media development process was executed through a structured four-stage collaborative framework. In Stage 1 (January–September 2024), the primary author conceptualized and drafted the core narrative, translating complex environmental concepts—such as soil degradation, aquatic toxicity, and air pollution from biomass burning—into age-appropriate, localized border stories. The content, illustrations, and learning activities were explicitly structured around ecoliteracy core competencies and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) themes, aligning with findings by Nikolopoulou and Gialamas (2021) on how interactive storytelling enhances emotional engagement and cognitive retention.

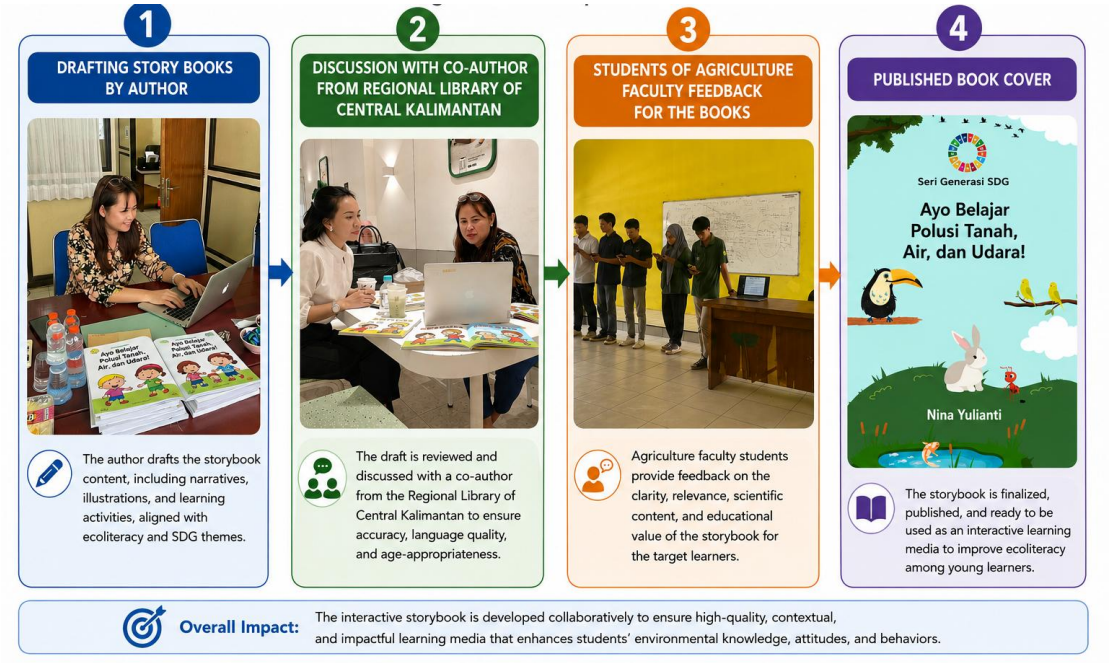

Figure 2. Four-stage development and pedagogical validation of the interactive environmental storybook *Ayo Belajar Polusi Tanah, Air, dan Udara!*

Stage 2 involved structural co-authorship with literacy specialists from the Regional Library Service of Central Kalimantan. This phase focused on optimizing syntactic complexity and lexical suitability to manage intrinsic cognitive load (Sweller, 2020). Gamified instructional elements, such as environmental crosswords and reflective prompts, were embedded to foster active learning (Sihvonen et al., 2024). In Stage 3, draft iterations underwent rigorous peer review by undergraduate and graduate evaluators from the Faculty of Agriculture at Universitas Palangka Raya. This academic vetting ensured the precise articulation of environmental indicators (e.g., point-source vs. non-point-source pollution) while maintaining developmental appropriateness (Poje et al., 2024). Finally, Stage 4

culminated in graphic integration and formal publication. The resulting visual scaffolding—featuring familiar local flora, fauna, and border landscapes—served as a critical cognitive bridge between abstract scientific principles and the students' lived experiences (Ranjbar et al., 2020).

3.2. Quantitative Eco-literacy Enhancement

The field intervention was executed at State Elementary School 03 (SDN 03) Sontas, strategically located 4 to 5 kilometers from the Entikong Cross-Border Post (PLBN Entikong) in West Kalimantan. This site represents a highly unique socio-educational node, as it serves a transnational demographic: children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMW) residing in Tebedu, Sarawak (Malaysia).

The pedagogical execution (October 10–11, 2024) synthesized narrative media consumption with Kolb's Experiential Learning framework. Activities transitioned sequentially from guided reading and waste-management workshops (the 3R framework) to contextual field observations along the border zone, similar to Azmiyati & Jannah (2024) and Muzri *et al*, (2025). By physically identifying localized point-source pollution and riparian degradation, students were guided to synthesize theoretical knowledge with tangible environmental realities.

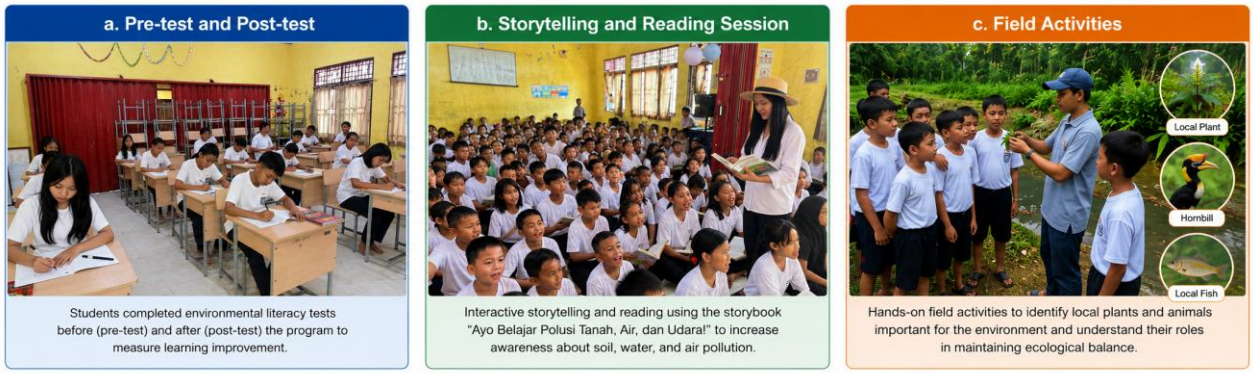

Figure 3. Implementation of community services for IMW children

To empirically assess the pedagogical efficacy of the intervention, a pilot diagnostic evaluation utilizing pre- and post-tests was administered to the participating IMW student cohort (n = 20). While the sample size is characteristic of an exploratory field pilot, the magnitude of the cognitive shifts provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of the localized media intervention.

Baseline assessments revealed significant deficits in environmental comprehension, with an overall pre-test mean of 54.5%. The lowest baseline proficiencies were recorded in soil contamination dynamics (52.0%) and aquatic degradation (55.0%). Following the experiential intervention, the post-test mean surged to 90.0%, marking a substantial net knowledge acquisition of +35.5% (Table 1).

The most pronounced cognitive development occurred in the domain of aquatic health (+37.5%). Crucially, the domain assessing pro-environmental intent and stewardship capacity exhibited a +35.5% gain. These findings corroborate recent empirical literature suggesting that the integration of localized narrative media with physical outdoor observation accelerates the internalization of pro-environmental behavioral intent among primary learners (Chawla, 2020).

3.3. Institutional Cooperation Framework for Long-Term Sustainability

Recognizing that ad-hoc educational interventions in frontier regions often fail to yield sustainable impacts, a macro-level institutional governance framework was established. The foundational negotiations for this partnership commenced in July 2024, initiated through a strategic online meeting between the decanate and the head of community services from both institutions (Figure. 4a) Culminating from these early dialogues, Universitas Palangka Raya (UPR) and Universitas Panca Bhakti (UPB) Pontianak formally ratified a strategic inter-university alliance on

October 11–12, 2024 (Figure 4b). This alliance effectively merges UPR's academic and content-generation capacities with UPB's robust regional logistical networks.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparative Eco-literacy Scores

Ecoliteracy Assessment Indicator	Pre-Test Average (%)	Post-Test Average (%)	Net Knowledge Gain (%)
Understanding Water Pollution & Aquatic Impacts	55.0	92.5	4. +37.5
Understanding Soil Contamination & Plastic Waste	52.0	88.0	5. +36.0
Understanding Air Pollution & Land Fires (*Karhutla*)	58.0	91.0	6. +33.0
Environmental Stewardship & Pro-Action Intent	53.0	88.5	7. +35.5
Overall Average Score	54.5	90.0	8. +35.5

When endorsed by key diplomatic entities, including the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Kuching, this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a vital operational architecture. It transitions the project from a localized community service initiative into a sustainable, scalable model for transboundary educational governance, ensuring continuous resource distribution and longitudinal tracking of IMW students (Williamson et al., 2016; Lee & Bozeman, 2019).



Figure 4. Milestones in the establishment of the international partnership between Universitas Palangka Raya and Universitas Panca Bhakti: (a) initial online coordination meeting (July 2024); and (b) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony formalizing collaboration in education, research, and international community engagement (October 2024).

3.4. Discussion: Policy Implications, and Future Recommendations

Thefindings demonstrate that integrating place-based interactive learning media, experiential environmental observation, and multi-institutional collaboration constitutes an effective strategy for strengthening eco-literacy among children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in border communities. The significant improvement in participants' eco-literacy (+35.5%) confirms that contextual learning experiences, which connect environmental concepts with children's everyday surroundings, are more effective than conventional classroom-based instruction in promoting ecological understanding and pro-environmental awareness. These findings are consistent with contemporary environmental education literature emphasizing that experiential and place-based pedagogies enhance children's environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions by situating learning within authentic local contexts (Ardoin et al., 2020; Gichuru & Thuranira, 2025).

Beyond its educational outcomes, this program demonstrates the importance of community–university partnerships in addressing educational inequalities in geographically isolated border regions. Collaboration among universities, border schools, diplomatic representatives, local communities, and border authorities enabled the co-development and implementation of educational interventions tailored to the unique needs of migrant children. Such collaborative governance reflects the interactive partnership model proposed by Williamson et al. (2016), in which sustainable community engagement depends on reciprocal relationships, shared responsibilities, and continuous knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Consequently, the integrated eco-literacy model developed in this study represents not only an educational innovation but also a governance framework that can strengthen environmental education in marginalized transboundary communities.

The policy implications extend beyond improving environmental education. First, eco-literacy should be incorporated into the regular curriculum of Community Learning Centres (CLCs), Sanggar Bimbingan, and Indonesian border schools serving migrant children. Second, stronger institutional collaboration between Indonesian and Malaysian educational authorities is needed to ensure equitable access to quality education for migrant children living in border areas. Third, universities should be encouraged to institutionalize community engagement programs through long-term partnerships with schools, local governments, and diplomatic institutions, thereby enabling sustainable knowledge transfer and capacity building in frontier communities.

Although the program produced encouraging outcomes, several limitations should be acknowledged. The intervention involved a relatively small sample ($n = 20$) and was evaluated over a short implementation period; therefore, the long-term sustainability of behavioral change could not be assessed. In addition, the program relied primarily on printed instructional media because limited internet connectivity constrained the integration of digital learning technologies. These limitations provide opportunities for future development.

Future initiatives should therefore focus on four strategic priorities. First, longitudinal studies involving larger participant cohorts ($n > 100$) over six to twelve months are needed to evaluate the persistence of environmental knowledge and the development of long-term pro-environmental behaviors. Second, policymakers should strengthen institutional support for Community Learning Centres (CLCs), particularly non-plantation CLCs, Sanggar Bimbingan, and other alternative educational services to ensure sustainable educational access for Indonesian migrant children in border areas. Third, future educational innovations should integrate offline-first digital applications with printed eco-literacy materials to overcome technological constraints while expanding learning opportunities in remote communities. Finally, the collaborative model developed in this study should be replicated and adapted in other international border regions facing similar educational and environmental challenges, thereby contributing to broader implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education), 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

4. Conclusion

This study validates the pedagogical efficacy and structural viability of a multi-stage, collaborative model for delivering targeted environmental education to underserved transboundary communities. By systematically developing, validating, and deploying the interactive storybook "Ayo Belajar Polusi Tanah, Air, dan Udara!", the initiative successfully translated abstract global sustainability goals into highly localized, cognitively accessible learning experiences.

The pilot implementation at SDN 03 Sontas, located along the Indonesia–Malaysia border, resulted in a substantial improvement in participants' eco-literacy, with an average increase of 35.5% in post-intervention scores. Beyond enhancing children's understanding of soil, water, and air pollution, the program fostered stronger environmental awareness and encouraged pro-environmental behavioral intentions through contextual and participatory learning activities.

This study also contributes conceptually by demonstrating that environmental education in border regions should extend beyond conventional classroom instruction toward collaborative, place-based, and community-engaged learning. The education institutional partnership established among Universitas Palangka Raya, Universitas Panca Bhakti, and SDN 03 Sontas, with strategic support from government institutions—including the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuching (KJRI Kuching) and the Entikong Border Post (PLBN Entikong)—illustrates how higher education institutions can serve as catalysts for sustainable educational governance in marginalized transboundary communities. By integrating academic expertise, governmental support, and community participation, this collaborative model strengthens the capacity to address interconnected educational and environmental challenges while fostering long-term environmental stewardship among children in border regions.

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