



Religious-Ecological Values in the Tidung Tale "Ketupat Imbiuku" from Lets Read

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Abstract

This study examines the children's story Ketupat Imbiuku, which is rooted in the Tidung community's local tradition of tolak bala, a ritual to ward off misfortune, and analyzes how it conveys religious-ecological values and moral education. Drawing on frameworks from children's literature studies, religious ecology, and postcolonial ecocriticism, the study explores how the narrative uses ritual, symbolism, and child characters to introduce sustainable values through storytelling. The narrative setting in coastal landscapes, the use of natural materials such as nipah and perepat, and the prohibition against choosing one's own rice cake illustrate the interconnection between spiritual practices and ecological ethics. Through the character of Sinan, children are introduced to empathy, responsibility, and the significance of collective wellbeing. Importantly, Ketupat Imbiuku is distributed through Let's Read, a digital literacy platform that provides open-access children's books across Asia. As a digital children's literature initiative, Let's Read enhances accessibility to culturally rooted stories and demonstrates the potential of digital storytelling in supporting localized and inclusive environmental education. The analysis reveals that Ketupat Imbiuku exemplifies a form of eco-spiritual pedagogy that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in quality education, climate action, and cultural sustainability. The study concludes that localized digital children's literature holds transformative potential for cultivating moral and environmental consciousness from an early age, especially when grounded in Indigenous wisdom and cultural practices.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Local Wisdom, Moral Education, Religious Ecology, Sustainability.



Introduction

In recent decades, the urgency of addressing ecological degradation has become a pressing global concern. Reports from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services warn that nearly one million species face extinction due to human-induced environmental change (*Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, 2020). Climate instability, loss of biodiversity, and environmental injustices are not merely technical problems but deeply intertwined with socio-cultural and ethical issues (*United Nations Environment Programme*, n.d.). In response, the notion of sustainable development has evolved to encompass not only environmental conservation but also cultural and spiritual dimensions of human existence. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda highlights the role of education and cultural values in achieving sustainability, emphasizing that environmental ethics must be grounded in local knowledge, spiritual wisdom, and intergenerational learning (Assembly, 2015). In this context, the intersection between religion and ecology has drawn increasing attention, as it provides a moral foundation for ecological responsibility (Assembly, 2015). However, mainstream sustainability discourses often overlook the potential of early childhood education and literature in transmitting these integrated values, particularly within Indigenous communities in Southeast Asia.

Scholarly interest in children's literature as a didactic-ecological medium has grown steadily, especially in the Global North (Russell & Anderson, 1994). Studies have explored how children's narratives encode ecological consciousness, empathy towards nature, and moral development through imaginative storytelling and symbolism (Akbar et al., 2021). In Indonesia, a multicultural and environmentally diverse archipelago, local children's literature remains underexplored in terms of its capacity to integrate religious values, ecological wisdom, and moral education. Existing research tends to focus on general literacy development or moral pedagogy without systematically analyzing how ecological and spiritual values are embedded in traditional narratives for children (Russell & Anderson, 1994). Moreover, while postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015) and eco-spirituality (Buell, 2009) provide valuable frameworks, their application to Indigenous children's texts in Southeast Asia, especially among minoritized groups like the Tidung people of North Kalimantan, is virtually absent in current scholarship. This reflects a significant research gap at the intersection of literary studies, ecological ethics, and Indigenous epistemologies in children's education.

This study addresses that gap by examining the children's story *Ketupat Imbiuku* (My Grandma's Ketupat), a narrative rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Tidung people (Gusniati, 2022). The story centers around a communal ritual involving prayer, shared food, and the use of local natural materials, reflecting both ecological awareness and religious devotion. Through the eyes of a young protagonist, the story illustrates how ritual practices like *tolak bala* (ritual warding-off of misfortune), collective food-sharing, and use of organic materials (nipah leaves, perepat) function not merely as folklore, but as embodied lessons in sustainability, empathy, and interdependence. The main objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to explore



how *Ketupat Imbiuku* represents the interrelation between religious and ecological values; (2) to analyze how the story communicates moral, cultural, and spiritual values to children; and (3) to evaluate its relevance for sustainable education within the framework of children's literature.

This article contributes a novel perspective by integrating children's literature studies, religious ecology, and local wisdom in a Southeast Asian context. While prior research has emphasized either ecological storytelling or moral education in children's texts, this study uniquely foregrounds religious-ecological narrative structures as a vehicle for value transmission in an Indigenous Indonesian setting. The study also advances the discourse on literature-based sustainability education by highlighting how culturally embedded stories can function as pedagogical tools for young readers, especially when grounded in local ritual practices and symbolic ecosystems. From an academic standpoint, this research expands the field of children's literature criticism by applying postcolonial ecocriticism to non-Western, spiritually-infused texts. Practically, it offers insight into how culturally relevant stories may serve as instruments for early sustainability education and character formation in diverse socio-ecological settings.

The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a literary-analytical approach, focusing on narrative, symbolism, and thematic representation. Textual analysis is conducted on the verbal and visual elements of *Ketupat Imbiuku*, with particular attention to how the story articulates values of environmental care, communal empathy, and religious practice. The research draws upon cultural ecology, spiritual ecocriticism, and children's literary pedagogy to unpack how narrative structures and cultural elements function together to construct a vision of sustainable and harmonious life. Ultimately, this study underscores the power of local children's literature to mediate between tradition and transformation, offering a vital resource for both academic inquiry and practical education in an age of ecological uncertainty.

The intersection of children's literature, environmental ethics, and spirituality has garnered increasing scholarly attention, yet remains underdeveloped in relation to Indigenous narratives and Southeast Asian contexts. Early studies in children's literature emphasize its didactic, aesthetic, and developmental functions (Avery et al., 1995). These foundational works highlight how stories shape children's moral imagination and cognitive engagement. In recent years, scholars have explored how literature can cultivate ecological awareness, particularly through the lens of ecopedagogy and eco-criticism (Lukens, 1998). Such approaches foreground the representation of nature and sustainability values in children's texts. However, they often focus on Western literary traditions and secular environmentalism, overlooking how ecological ethics can emerge from spiritual, ritual, and cosmological worldviews embedded in local narratives.

Another relevant body of work concerns religious ecology and eco-spirituality, which examine how spiritual traditions and rituals inform human-nature relationships (Lukens, 1998). While these studies underline the role of religion in promoting environmental responsibility, they rarely explore how these themes are encoded in literature for children, especially within minority cultures. Similarly, postcolonial ecocriticism critiques the dominance of Eurocentric



environmental paradigms and advocates for integrating Indigenous perspectives (Lukens, 1998). Yet, its application to children's literature remains rare, and even more so in the context of Indonesia's ethnolinguistic diversity. Some Indonesian scholars have addressed moral and educational values in children's stories, but without engaging the intertwined role of ecology and religious ritual in those texts (Bahasa et al., 2019; Pendidikan & 2004, n.d.).

The intersection between children's literature and sustainability education has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly through the lens of ecocriticism, environmental morality, and cultural pedagogy. A growing body of research affirms that storytelling is a powerful medium for cultivating ecological awareness and moral reasoning in young readers. However, existing studies often remain within descriptive or moralistic frames, lacking integration with cultural contexts and affective pedagogies. This section reviews four representative studies to situate the present article's contribution within the broader scholarly discourse.

Firman Syah, in his ecocritical reading of *The Time Travelling River*, highlights the representation of environmental degradation, particularly river pollution and ecological destruction, as central to children's awareness of environmental crises (Syah, 2020). Utilizing Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework, the article portrays the river as a witness to both environmental collapse and intergenerational trauma. While this study succeeds in problematizing the ecological consciousness of children through narrative exposure, it offers limited insight into cultural values or pedagogical strategies for transformation. The narrative centers on exposing environmental problems rather than guiding affective or behavioral change.

In contrast, Amalia and Nawawi explore *The Peasant and the Apple Tree*, a Greek folktale, through an ecocritical approach to extract moral lessons on ecological responsibility (Amalia & Nawawi, 2021). Their analysis underscores the importance of instilling environmental morality from an early age, particularly through allegorical storytelling. The tale of the farmer's care and eventual anger toward a non-fruiting apple tree introduces children to moral complexity, including the consequences of emotional impulses and disregard for other living beings. While the study effectively links environmental ethics and childhood education, it remains anthropocentric and does not address the role of local ecological knowledge or ritual practices in building sustainable awareness.

Expanding beyond textual morality, Ikhwan investigates the role of literature in promoting ecological pedagogy within the Indonesian Islamic context (Ikhwan, 2020). His study emphasizes how Islamic narratives offer a framework for environmental stewardship rooted in spiritual and ethical traditions. The incorporation of religious cosmologies in ecological discussions marks an important contribution to non-Western ecocriticism. However, the article primarily focuses on adult literature and lacks attention to how children's narratives might operationalize these theological values in a culturally accessible manner, especially through affective or visual media.

The current article offers a significant departure from these prior studies by analyzing *Ketupat Imbiuku* as a holistic medium for eco-spiritual and moral education. The story is not



merely a didactic narrative but a culturally embedded pedagogy that integrates local ecological knowledge (e.g., the use of *nipah* and *perepat* leaves), spiritual practices (e.g., *tolak bala* rituals), and emotional learning (e.g., empathy, self-regulation, and collective joy). While previous studies tend to isolate environmental or moral messages, this study frames *Ketupat Imbiuku* within a multimodal and multidimensional pedagogy emphasizing how illustrations, ritual symbols, food preparation, and interpersonal exchanges function as ethical and ecological texts.

More importantly, this article aligns the story with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), thereby positioning children's literature not merely as a cultural artifact but as a strategic pedagogical tool. The narrative's didactic values helping parents, making *imbiuku*, sharing joy, understanding tradition, and managing emotions are operationalized through concrete narrative moments, offering an affective curriculum that is both contextually grounded and globally relevant.

In sum, this article advances the field by proposing a model of eco-spiritual children's literature rooted in Indigenous pedagogy, affective ethics, and localized sustainability practices. It bridges gaps in the existing literature by integrating narrative ethics, visual semiotics, and character-based learning within a framework of transformative education. This contribution is especially novel in how it maps localized stories to global developmental agendas, offering both theoretical and practical insights into how children's literature can foster ecological citizenship and moral imagination.

This study builds upon those scholarly traditions but diverges through its interdisciplinary integration of children's literature analysis, postcolonial ecocriticism, and spiritual ecology, focusing on an Indigenous children's story from the Tidung people of North Kalimantan. Unlike previous studies, this research treats *Ketupat Imbiuku* not merely as a cultural artifact but as a narrative ecology, a literary site where values of sustainability, spiritual practice, and ethical learning intersect. The theoretical framework employed synthesizes Buell's (Lukens, 1998) concept of eco-spiritual imagination with Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) critique of global ecological hegemony, while drawing on narrative theory to analyze how these values are rendered accessible to children. This combination enables a nuanced reading that foregrounds the moral ecology of childhood education within a culturally specific, spiritually meaningful context.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with an emphasis on literary analysis grounded in religious-ecological and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The choice of method reflects the study's aim: to investigate how children's literature encodes ecological and spiritual values in culturally specific ways. By treating the narrative not simply as a text but as a moral-ecological discourse, this research prioritizes interpretive depth over empirical generalizability. The approach is justified given the symbolic richness and educational function

of the literary object, which necessitates close reading, thematic unpacking, and culturally situated interpretation.

The primary data source is the children's picture book *Ketupat Imbiuku* (Gusniati, 2022), a narrative that encapsulates ritual practices of the Tidung community. The book was selected based on its cultural relevance, ecological-symbolic content, and alignment with the study's objectives. The text integrates both verbal narration and visual illustration, making it suitable for multimodal analysis. Selection criteria include: (1) the story's grounding in local ritual (*tolak bala*), (2) its portrayal of child protagonists and pedagogical structure, and (3) its emphasis on natural materials and communal spiritual values. While the study centers on a single text, its analysis offers broader insights into localized forms of sustainability education.

Data were analyzed through three interconnected procedures: (1) thematic coding to identify religious, ecological, and moral values; (2) narrative analysis focusing on character construction, symbolic motifs (e.g., ketupat, daun nipah), and plot structure; and (3) ecospiritual interpretation to reveal the ethical and cosmological dimensions of the story. The process draws from Buell's eco-imagination to interpret nature-religion entanglements, while postcolonial ecocriticism informs the deconstruction of cultural representation and resistance to global ecological homogenization. This methodologically layered approach enables a critical yet empathetic reading of how localized narrative forms contribute to global discourses on education for sustainable development.

Results and Discussion

4.1. The Interrelation between Religiousness and Ecology

The children's story *Ketupat Imbiuku* portrays the Tidung community's cultural practice of *tolak bala*, a ritual intended to ward off misfortune, as a form of ecological spirituality integrated into childhood experiences. One of the most visually and narratively expressive moments occurs when Sinan and his mother walk through the forest path carrying *imbiuku* in a *gegantang*, heading toward the communal ritual site near the beach.



Sinan dan Ibu membawa
imbiuku dengan gegantang.
Acara diadakan di dekat
pantai. Teman-teman
Sinan juga sudah datang.
Keluarga mereka juga
membawa imbiuku buatan
masing-masing.

Picture 1 (page 3)
Sinan went to the location of the prayer meeting.

As depicted in the accompanying illustration, this movement through lush greenery toward an open, coastal space underscores the embodied relationship between ritual practice and

ecological landscape. The forest, the beach, and the presence of community members gathering with their homemade imbiuku reflect a worldview in which nature is not a neutral backdrop but a sacred setting that hosts collective spiritual acts.

This scene supports the argument that the ritual is not enclosed within institutional religion but rather enacted in living ecosystems, an idea aligned with Buell's (2005) notion of ecological embeddedness, where religious and ecological consciousness are deeply interwoven. The communal journey toward the ritual site, represented by families walking together, also symbolizes relational ethics and intergenerational transmission of spiritual values, a theme central to eco-spiritual pedagogy. Furthermore, the vibrant color palette and festive atmosphere in the illustration reinforce a vision of harmony between human beings and their environment, echoing Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) postcolonial critique that urges the validation of Indigenous ecological knowledge and spiritual cosmologies. In this way, the story and this scene in particular functions as a pedagogical narrative that fosters an affective and symbolic bond between children, culture, and the natural world.



Acara belum dimulai. Sinan dan teman-temannya bermain kejar-kejaran. Sinan berhati-hati agar daun perepat tidak rusak. Dia sudah punya rencana.

Picture 2 (page 7)

Sinan and his friends played around the boat while waiting for the event to start.

The scene in which Sinan and his friends engage in a game of tag before the commencement of the communal ritual subtly reveals the embeddedness of ecological and spiritual awareness within the everyday experiences of children. As Sinan consciously avoids stepping on the *perepat* leaves, natural materials integral to the forthcoming *tolak bala* ceremony, the narrative articulates what Buell (2005) refers to as ecological embeddedness, wherein spiritual consciousness is cultivated through direct, embodied interactions with the environment. This moment, while seemingly playful, serves as an early pedagogical encounter in which ecological mindfulness is not didactically imposed but affectively and experientially learned.

The care Sinan shows for the leaves illustrates an emerging eco-spiritual sensibility, signaling his intuitive grasp of their ritual significance and environmental value. From the standpoint of postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010), this episode exemplifies how Indigenous children's literature resists the abstraction of nature as mere backdrop, instead

portraying it as an active participant in moral and spiritual development. Furthermore, the child's inner monologue, "*he already had a plan*" introduces the complexities of ethical reasoning, where ecological respect coexists with personal intention, suggesting that moral growth in children unfolds through narrative spaces that balance play, ritual, and symbolic cognition. Ultimately, this passage demonstrates that *Ketupat Imbiuku* mobilizes child-centered storytelling to embed spiritual and ecological values within familiar cultural acts, thereby advancing a form of eco-spiritual pedagogy rooted in local cosmologies and childhood agency.

The choice of performing the ritual in nature, rather than in an enclosed space, reflects a spiritual worldview in which the environment constitutes a sacred realm. This aligns with what Buell (2005) conceptualizes as *ecological embeddedness*, wherein spiritual experiences are inseparable from ecological existence and are manifested through reciprocal human–nature relationships.



Pertama-tama, daun nipah dianyam menjadi cangkang imbiuku. Kemudian, cangkang diisi dengan beras ketan. Setelah itu, imbiuku direbus dengan santan.

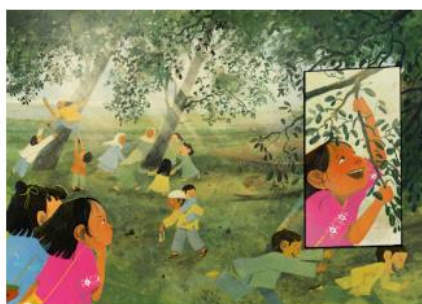
Picture 3 (page 3)
 Sinan makes ketupat from nipah leaves.

The illustrated sequence depicting the preparation of *imbiuku*, from weaving *nipah* leaves into casings, to filling them with glutinous rice, and finally boiling them in coconut milk, serves as a narrative embodiment of ecological spirituality and material ethics. The use of *nipah* leaves, a renewable local resource, reflects a deep-seated environmental consciousness embedded in traditional practices, whereby ritual foods are not only culturally significant but also ecologically attuned. This aligns with the notion of *sacred ecology*, wherein natural elements are imbued with spiritual meaning and serve as conduits for intergenerational knowledge transmission (Gottlieb, 2006; Tucker & Grim, 2014).

The tactile and communal nature of food preparation further situates the act within what Buell (2005) calls *eco-spiritual imagination*, a mode of ethical engagement with the environment that is both sensory and symbolic. Involving children in the crafting of *imbiuku* illustrates how ecological care and cultural continuity are interwoven through everyday acts, thereby transforming mundane domestic labor into an eco-pedagogical ritual. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, the narrative resists industrialized notions of food production by foregrounding Indigenous foodways as legitimate sites of ecological knowledge and cultural

identity (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). The process depicted is not only environmentally sustainable but also socially formative, reinforcing communal interdependence, gendered labor roles, and the sanctity of localized ecological practices. Thus, this narrative moment operates as a pedagogical and political act, inscribing ecological and spiritual literacy into the foundational experiences of childhood through culturally embedded storytelling.

The use of natural materials such as *nipah* leaves, *perepat* (*Sonneratia alba*, a type of mangrove), and *gegantang* (woven baskets) in the making and distribution of *imbiuku* (traditional rice cakes) demonstrates strong cosmological symbolism. These elements are not merely functional; they embody spiritual and ecological meanings, anchoring local ritual practices in environmental respect and interdependence. From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, Huggan and Tiffin (2010) emphasize the importance of restoring marginalized local narratives that offer alternative environmental imaginaries to dominant secular and technocratic models. *Ketupat Imbiuku* presents such an alternative, showing that sustainability can be understood not only through scientific or policy frameworks, but also through community spirituality and sacred ecological relations.



Sinan bergegas ke tikar anak-anak. Sinan masih memikirkan imbiuku ekor panjang tadi. Bagaimana, ya, cara mendapatkannya? Hmmm ... daun perepat itu bisa digunakan.

Picture 4 (page 6)

Sinan uses mangrove leaves to cover the ketupat from the reach of others.

For children, this narrative serves as both an affective and cognitive encounter, introducing the understanding that nature is not an object of exploitation, but part of a sacred web of life. As such, the story does not merely depict a ritual, it transmits a vision of religious-ecological interconnectedness as the ethical foundation for sustainability education. This resonates with the principles of *eco-spiritual literacy* in children's literature, which fosters a cosmic awareness from an early age. The narrative thus expands the domain of ecocriticism in children's literature by embedding local spiritualities as transformative and context-sensitive environmental pedagogy.

4.2. Moral Values and Communal Wisdom

The illustrated moment in which Uli gently taps Sinan's shoulder and offers him the long-tailed *imbiuku*, the very one he had hoped to claim for himself, serves as a profound culmination

of the story's moral arc and exemplifies the values of empathy, altruism, and communal harmony. Uli's gesture, motivated by compassion and selflessness, not only disrupts Sinan's earlier plan to secretly claim the desirable rice cake but also models the internalization of moral agency through affective action. This episode operationalizes what Nodelman (2008) describes as *narrative ethics*, where moral learning occurs not through didactic instruction but through emotionally resonant interactions embedded in familiar cultural contexts.

From the perspective of eco-spiritual pedagogy, Uli's act of giving, grounded in familial care and communal sharing, transcends individual attachment and affirms a relational ethic that situates moral responsibility within a spiritual-ecological worldview. The *imbiuku* offered is not merely a material object but a vessel of maternal labor, spiritual significance, and communal trust. Uli's willingness to part with it reflects a form of sacrificial generosity deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the Tidung community. Such acts exemplify what Buell (2005) terms *ecological embeddedness*, not only in relation to nature but to the social ecology of interdependence, where care circulates through food, ritual, and human connection.

Furthermore, the episode articulates what postcolonial ecocriticism identifies as resistance to capitalist individualism and commodified value systems. In contrast to possessive logics that prize ownership and self-interest, Uli's gesture enacts a form of decolonial ethics, grounded in localized moral wisdom and reciprocal obligation (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). The visibility of women's labor, Uli explicitly names her mother as the maker of the *imbiuku*, also inscribes gendered contributions into the narrative's moral economy, highlighting the matrifocal transmission of care and ethics.

This moment of interpersonal exchange, facilitated not by authority but by peer solidarity, thus becomes an axis of moral transformation. Sinan's silent reception of Uli's gift, preceded by his internal conflict and minor transgression, marks his shift from egocentric desire to communal belonging. It illustrates the capacity of children's literature to scaffold ethical development through culturally embedded acts of grace, empathy, and emotional intelligence. As such, this narrative instance powerfully demonstrates that moral education within *Ketupat Imbiuku* is not abstract or universalist, but intimately grounded in the everyday practices, kinship structures, and ritual logics of an Indigenous community, where wisdom is lived, enacted, and shared.



Tahu-tahu pundak Sinan ditepuk. Uli menyodorkan imbiuku ekor panjang. Dia mendapatkan imbiuku buatan ibunya. Karena itu, Uli memberikannya kepada Sinan.

Picture 5 (page 16)
 Uli gave Sinan the long-tailed ketupat she was after.

The character of *Uli*, a girl who helps her mother collect *imbiuku*, not only represents the social role of women in the Tidung culture but also serves as a metaphor for the virtue of altruism. Her gesture transcends individual interest and embodies *generosity as moral agency*, a trait that can inspire young readers. Suhariato (2021) underscores that Indonesian children's literature plays a pivotal role in shaping social character, particularly when stories draw upon living cultural practices. In this sense, *Ketupat Imbiuku* is grounded in a *transgenerational local wisdom* that not only imparts ethical norms but also reinforces communal solidarity.

As a child protagonist, Sinan becomes a realistic representation of moral development, moving from personal desire and minor transgression toward guilt, reflection, and the acceptance of ethical values. This journey is rendered more effective through a concrete and culturally familiar narrative that reflects everyday experiences of Indonesian children. Rather than imposing morality through prescriptive narration, the story enables children to internalize values through identification and empathetic engagement. Thus, *Ketupat Imbiuku* illustrates how children's literature can function as an effective vehicle for culturally grounded character education with strong social and psychological relevance.



Acara pembacaan doa
dimulai. Sinan dan teman-
teman segera duduk.
Imbiuku di hadapan mereka
sudah menggoda selera.
Namun, mereka harus
bersabar.

Picture 6 (page 8)
The whole community sits facing each other in prayer.

The depiction of the prayer gathering, where Sinan and his peers sit in orderly rows facing an array of *imbiuku* yet refrain from eating until the communal prayer concludes, embodies a ritualized pedagogy of patience, reverence, and self-regulation. The aesthetic composition of the image, children and adults seated on mats in a symmetrical, circular orientation, visually enacts a moral order rooted in collectivity and spiritual focus. This moment exemplifies how religious practice is seamlessly woven into social and ecological rhythms, reinforcing what Buell (2005) conceptualizes as *ecological embeddedness*: the integration of spiritual discipline within the flow of communal and environmental life.

In this scene, the *imbiuku*, placed within reach yet untouched, becomes more than a symbol of sustenance; it is transformed into a test of restraint and shared moral discipline. The



children's ability to delay gratification, despite the sensory temptation of the food before them, reflects a communal ethic of deference to sacred time and process. Such behavior is not enforced by coercion but emerges from a collective cultural script, internalized through ritual participation. This illustrates Nodelman's (2008) *narrative ethics*, where moral learning unfolds through emotionally and culturally grounded experiences rather than prescriptive narration.

From a postcolonial ecocritical lens (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010), the public and open-air nature of the gathering challenges Western paradigms of religious practice as privatized or institutional. Instead, spirituality here is democratized and ecological, occurring under the canopy of trees, with nature not as backdrop but as co-participant in the sacred. The inclusion of children in the ritual, not merely as observers but as active participants, further signals an Indigenous epistemology that values early moral formation through situated, embodied practice.

Moreover, the gender and generational diversity depicted in the scene reaffirms a communal ethic that transcends age and authority, inviting all members, young and old, male and female, into a shared sacred rhythm. The act of waiting, in this context, becomes a formative ethical gesture, teaching children that communal rituals, like ecological systems, operate on cycles that require humility and patience. Thus, this moment in *Ketupat Imbiuku* offers a rich tableau of how moral values and communal wisdom are transmitted through ritual time, spatial arrangement, and disciplined anticipation, all of which are essential components of an eco-spiritual pedagogy grounded in Indigenous practice.

4.3. Children's Literature as a Medium for Sustainability Education

Ketupat Imbiuku adheres to the foundational conventions of children's literature: it features a child protagonist, follows a clear and relatable narrative structure, and is complemented by vibrant illustrations that support visual cognition and emotional engagement. The central character, Sinan, along with his peers, functions as a narrative conduit through which young readers can navigate the complex interplay between everyday experiences and embedded ethical values. The depiction of mangrove forests, woven mats laden with rice cakes, and traditional Tidung attire imbues the story with a rich sensory and cultural atmosphere, grounding its ecological message in a familiar and affectively resonant context.

More than a vehicle for conveying explicit moral instruction, the story subtly cultivates critical thinking, prompting children to reflect on their intentions, desires, and the wider social and environmental consequences of their actions. In doing so, it fulfills its role as a medium for sustainability education in alignment with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). By framing literacy as a multidimensional process, infused with ecological awareness and cultural spirituality, *Ketupat Imbiuku* demonstrates how narrative can serve as both a cognitive and moral compass for young readers navigating a rapidly changing world. Additionally, the narrative embodies a set of didactic values that are essential for holistic character education in early childhood. First, the story emphasizes the importance of helping



parents, as Sinan and Uli participate in domestic preparations for the ritual, modeling filial piety and collaborative family life. Second, the step-by-step portrayal of making imbiuku from local materials such as nipah leaves and glutinous rice introduces children to traditional ecological knowledge and the values of craftsmanship, patience, and resourcefulness. Third, the narrative underscores the virtue of sharing joy with others, as evidenced by communal rituals, mutual food offerings, and moments of altruistic giving, such as Uli's selfless gift to Sinan. Fourth, the story functions as a gentle and effective medium for understanding tradition, embedding Tidung cultural practices like *tolak bala* within a storyline that is accessible and meaningful for children. Lastly, the plot invites children to engage in emotional self-regulation, as Sinan's initial disappointment and desire are gradually transformed into empathy, humility, and gratitude. These didactic elements are not presented in isolation but are woven seamlessly into the narrative structure and visual storytelling. As such, *Ketupat Imbiuku* aligns with the concept of multicultural literacy (Hunt, 1995), which recognizes the pedagogical power of stories in presenting diverse cultural expressions and moral perspectives. Within the framework of Indonesia's national education goals, especially the emphasis on local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) and character building, this story offers a curriculum-compatible and culturally anchored teaching resource. Its potential integration into local-content curricula and character education modules reinforces its value not only as an aesthetic literary work but also as a transformative pedagogical tool. Through its fusion of ecological, spiritual, and social learning, *Ketupat Imbiuku* exemplifies how culturally rooted children's literature can cultivate ethically and ecologically conscious citizens from an early age.

Conclusion

The children's story *Ketupat Imbiuku* offers a compelling narrative that bridges religious-ecological values, local moral wisdom, and child-centered education. By weaving together the ritual practice of *tolak bala* from the Tidung community with storytelling elements suitable for young readers, the narrative illustrates how ecological spirituality can be meaningfully introduced in early childhood through literature. This story demonstrates that nature, culture, and spirituality are not isolated domains but are intimately connected through symbolic practices, materials, and communal rituals that reaffirm the sacredness of the environment.

The story's emphasis on collective prayer in open natural settings, the use of organic materials such as *nipah* leaves and *perepat*, and the ritual of food sharing without ego-centered selection exemplify a holistic worldview that nurtures empathy, interdependence, and environmental consciousness. These dimensions reflect Buell's (2005) concept of *ecological embeddedness* and resonate with Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) call for a decolonial environmental ethic rooted in local cosmologies. Furthermore, the narrative provides moral scaffolding for children's ethical development through what Nodelman (2008) identifies as *narrative ethics*,



where values are not taught didactically but experienced through story-driven reflection and emotional engagement.

From an educational standpoint, *Ketupat Imbiuku* demonstrates the potential of children's literature as a transformative tool for sustainability education. It aligns with key priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education (SDG 4), climate action (SDG 13), and the protection of cultural diversity (SDG 11). Its child-centered structure, culturally rich illustrations, and moral resonance make it an effective medium for integrating environmental, moral, and spiritual literacy in primary school curricula, particularly within multicultural and Indigenous contexts.

In sum, this study underscores the need to revalue local children's stories not only as cultural texts but as ethical ecologies that shape how children understand and relate to the world. *Ketupat Imbiuku* exemplifies how Indigenous knowledge and spiritual traditions can inform a more holistic, contextual, and morally grounded approach to sustainability education. Future research and curriculum development would benefit from further exploring such narratives, particularly those embedded in underrepresented cultural communities, as they hold the keys to cultivating the next generation of ethically and ecologically conscious citizens.

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