

TRADITIONAL GAMES PRESERVING LOCAL CULTURE: AN ECOLINGUISTIC STUDY AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract: Indonesia's linguistic and cultural diversity is increasingly threatened by globalization and the dominance of digital entertainment, which marginalize traditional practices and local language use among younger generations. Traditional games represent an important cultural practice that integrates language, social values, and environmental knowledge. While previous studies have primarily focused on the cultural, educational, and developmental functions of traditional games, little attention has been given to their potential as ecolinguistic environments that support the maintenance of local linguistic diversity in multicultural secondary school communities. This study explores traditional games from an ecolinguistic perspective to examine their role in preserving local languages and cultural values among senior high school students at SMA Sains Tahfidz Qur'an Al-Ammar, Indonesia. The study focused on local linguistic expressions associated with Batak, Malay, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese backgrounds that emerged during traditional games such as engklek and gobak sodor. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical design, data were collected through classroom and playground observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The participants consisted of 30 students and 3 teachers selected through purposive sampling. The analysis focused on linguistic expressions, cultural meanings, and ecological contexts embedded in traditional games. The findings reveal that traditional games function as ecological linguistic spaces where local vocabulary, discourse patterns, and cultural norms such as cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect are naturally transmitted. Moreover, the use of natural materials and spatial environments in games reflects the interdependence between language, culture, and the physical environment. The study argues that integrating traditional games into educational contexts can foster sustainable language practices and cultural awareness. From an ecolinguistic perspective, traditional games are not merely recreational activities but dynamic ecosystems that sustain linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Ecolinguistics, Traditional Games, Language Preservation, Cultural Sustainability, Local Culture*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalization, linguistic and cultural diversity faces unprecedented challenges due to the dominance of global languages, digital technologies, and homogenized cultural practices. Local languages and traditional cultural practices are increasingly marginalized, especially among younger generations who are more exposed to

global media and digital entertainment (Rivaldi & Benhar, 2025). Scholars have long emphasized that language is not merely a system of communication, but a repository of ecological knowledge, cultural identity, and social values embedded within specific communities (Rahmadi & Sugiharto, 2021; Ummah et al., 2025). As globalization accelerates, the ecological balance between language, culture, and environment is disrupted, leading to linguistic erosion and cultural disconnection from local environments.

Traditional games constitute an integral part of intangible cultural heritage, reflecting local knowledge systems, social structures, and linguistic practices transmitted across generations (Hardiyanti Sahabuddin & Edy, 2025). These games often involve specific lexical items, discourse patterns, and pragmatic norms that are deeply rooted in local cultural contexts. Beyond recreation, traditional games function as social institutions that mediate cultural learning, identity formation, and environmental awareness. In many societies, traditional games incorporate natural materials, spatial practices, and community-based interactions, illustrating the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and the environment. For example, when students play traditional games such as congklak or gobak sodor, they use local vocabulary, follow culturally embedded rules, and interact with physical spaces and materials from their surroundings, demonstrating how language, culture, and the environment are interconnected in everyday practices. Therefore, examining traditional games offers a valuable lens to understand how linguistic and cultural knowledge is sustained within ecological contexts.

Ecolinguistics has emerged as an interdisciplinary field that investigates the relationships among language, culture, and ecological systems. Although the field originated from Haugen's concept of the "ecology of language," contemporary ecolinguistic research has expanded beyond language diversity to examine how linguistic practices shape ecological awareness, cultural sustainability, and human–environment relationships (Harrison, 2023; Isti'anah, A., 2023). Recent studies emphasize that language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a mechanism for transmitting ecological knowledge, cultural values, and environmental practices across generations (Fine, J. C., Love-Nichols, J., & Perley, 2023; Prastio, B., Santoso, A., Roekhan, R., 2023a). Furthermore, current ecolinguistic scholarship highlights the role of discourse, narratives, and social practices in fostering life-sustaining relationships between humans and their environments (Cowley, 2024a; Ponton, 2024; Steffensen, 2024). From this perspective, traditional games can be understood as ecological linguistic practices in which language, cultural values, and environmental elements coexist and interact within everyday social activities. For example, when students engage in traditional games, they employ culturally specific vocabulary, follow socially shared rules, and interact with physical spaces and locally available materials, illustrating how language, culture, and environment are interconnected. This theoretical lens provides a robust framework for analyzing traditional games not merely as cultural artifacts but as sites where linguistic and cultural knowledge are continuously reproduced and sustained.

International research on language ecology and cultural practices has demonstrated that everyday cultural activities play a significant role in sustaining linguistic diversity and ecological awareness. Recent studies have highlighted how linguistic practices embedded in local knowledge systems contribute to cultural resilience and environmental sustainability. For example, research on environmental vocabulary in Indonesian regional languages revealed that local lexical resources preserve ecological knowledge and reflect close relationships between language and the environment. Similarly, recent ecolinguistic studies have examined how environmental conservation practices are represented through indigenous discourse and eco-

lexicons, demonstrating the role of language in maintaining ecological knowledge and cultural continuity (Prastio, B., Santoso, A., Roekhan, R., 2023b). Contemporary ecolinguistic scholarship has also expanded its focus to include the analysis of narratives, discourse practices, and social imaginaries that shape ecological awareness and sustainable ways of living (Cowley, 2024b; Ponton, 2024). Furthermore, systematic reviews indicate that current ecolinguistic research increasingly investigates language diversity, local wisdom, ecological awareness, and cultural sustainability across various social contexts (Isti'anah, A., 2023). However, despite these developments, traditional games remain relatively underexplored within the ecolinguistic framework, particularly in educational settings where language, culture, and environmental knowledge are simultaneously transmitted. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the ecolinguistic dimensions of traditional games and their potential contribution to cultural preservation and linguistic sustainability.

In the Indonesian context, scholars have extensively documented traditional games from anthropological, educational, and sociocultural perspectives. Research by Sibarani (2018) and Alamsyah (2021) emphasized the role of local cultural practices in maintaining linguistic and cultural identity. Yuliana & Wijaya (2024) examined linguistic practices in traditional children's games, highlighting their role in transmitting local vocabulary and cultural values. Wulandari & Saputra (2020) discussed the impact of globalization on traditional games among students, indicating a decline in participation and knowledge of local games. Despite these contributions, most Indonesian studies have treated traditional games as cultural heritage objects rather than as ecological linguistic systems. The ecolinguistic dimensions of traditional games particularly how language, culture, and environment interact in educational contexts remain insufficiently explored.

Experts in ecolinguistics and sociolinguistics argue that sustaining linguistic diversity requires maintaining the cultural practices that enable language use in meaningful contexts. Fishman (1991) asserted that language maintenance depends on intergenerational transmission within cultural domains, while Stibbe (2015) emphasized that ecological discourse and practices are essential for cultural sustainability (Hari Darmawan et al., 2024). From this expert perspective, traditional games can be conceptualized as domains of language use that facilitate intergenerational transmission, socialization, and ecological awareness. By analyzing traditional games through an ecolinguistic lens, researchers can uncover how linguistic practices are embedded within ecological and cultural systems, thereby contributing to theories of language maintenance and cultural sustainability.

Although previous studies have acknowledged the cultural and educational significance of traditional games, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding their ecolinguistic functions (Harrison, 2023). Recent reviews indicate that international ecolinguistic research has predominantly focused on environmental discourse, ecological narratives, language and sustainability, and representations of human–environment relationships (Cowley, 2024b; Isti'anah, A., 2023; Steffensen, 2024). Likewise, studies have explored indigenous ecological knowledge and environmental conservation through linguistic and discursive practices (Prastio, B., Santoso, A., Roekhan, R., 2023a). However, relatively little attention has been given to the linguistic ecology of play and traditional games as sites where language, culture, and environmental knowledge interact. In Indonesia, traditional games have been widely investigated from educational, cultural, and character-development perspectives yet few studies have employed an explicit ecolinguistic framework to examine the ecological interdependence between language, culture, and environment. Furthermore, research

addressing traditional games within multicultural formal educational settings remains limited. This discrepancy highlights the need for an ecolinguistic investigation of traditional games in educational contexts to understand their potential role in sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity.

This study addresses the aforementioned gap by examining traditional games as ecolinguistic practices within a senior high school setting in Indonesia. Senior high schools provide a particularly relevant context because adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, language use, and cultural negotiation. At this stage, students are increasingly exposed to global media, digital technologies, and diverse linguistic influences that may reduce their engagement with local cultural traditions. At the same time, schools function as important sites for cultural transmission where students from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds interact on a daily basis. Unlike previous research that primarily adopts anthropological or pedagogical perspectives, this study applies an ecolinguistic framework to analyze how language, cultural values, and environmental elements interact in traditional games. The research focuses on linguistic expressions, discourse patterns, and ecological contexts embedded in traditional games played by students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. By situating traditional games within the ecology of language, this study contributes to the growing body of ecolinguistic research and offers empirical evidence from a multicultural educational context, which remains underrepresented in previous studies.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the ecolinguistic dimensions of traditional games among senior high school students in Indonesia. Specifically, it seeks to identify the linguistic expressions used in traditional games, examine the cultural values transmitted through these activities, and analyze how relationships among language, culture, and environmental elements are reflected in gameplay practices. Through this investigation, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on the role of traditional games in supporting cultural continuity and linguistic diversity within a multicultural educational setting. By adopting an ecolinguistic perspective, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of traditional games in sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity and to offer insights for integrating traditional games into educational practices as a strategy for language and cultural preservation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design grounded in an ecolinguistic framework. The qualitative approach was selected to explore in depth the linguistic expressions, cultural values, and ecological contexts embedded in traditional games practiced by students (Sugiyono, 2017). An ecolinguistic perspective was applied to examine the interrelationships between language, culture, and environment within the context of traditional play (Sudaryanto, 1993). This design enabled the researcher to interpret traditional games as ecological linguistic practices rather than merely cultural artifacts, thereby providing a holistic understanding of their role in language and cultural sustainability.

2.1. Research Site, Population, and Participants

The research was conducted at SMA Sains Tahfidz Qur'an Al-Ammar, Indonesia, a senior high school with students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, including Batak, Malay, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese communities. The school environment

was selected because it represents a multilingual and multicultural ecological setting where linguistic and cultural interactions occur daily.

The total school population consisted of 120 students and 18 teachers during the 2025/2026 academic year. For the purposes of this study, 30 students were selected through purposive sampling based on their active participation in traditional games and willingness to participate in interviews and observations. The participants included 16 female students and 14 male students, representing Grade X (10 students), Grade XI (10 students), and Grade XII (10 students). In addition, three teachers responsible for extracurricular and cultural activities were interviewed to provide contextual information regarding the implementation and preservation of traditional games within the school environment. The diversity of participants enabled the researcher to capture a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and ecological perspectives related to traditional games.

The population consisted of all students enrolled at the school. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were knowledgeable about traditional games and local cultural practices. Participant eligibility was determined through teacher recommendations and an initial screening process. During the screening, students were asked to identify traditional games they had played, describe the rules and objectives of the games, and explain the language expressions commonly used during gameplay. Only students who demonstrated familiarity with these aspects were included in the study. Teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in cultural education, extracurricular activities, or school programs promoting traditional games. This procedure ensured that all participants possessed adequate experiential and cultural knowledge to contribute meaningful insights to the ecolinguistic analysis.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through multiple qualitative instruments to ensure methodological triangulation. First, non-participant and participant observations were conducted to document traditional game practices, linguistic interactions, and environmental contexts during play activities. Field notes were used to record specific linguistic features, including local vocabulary, commands, chants, turn-taking expressions, and culturally meaningful phrases used during gameplay. Observations also focused on discourse patterns such as cooperation, negotiation, rule enforcement, and conflict resolution among players. In addition, ecological contexts were documented by examining the physical settings of the games, the use of natural or locally available materials, and the ways participants interacted with their surrounding environment during play. These observational data enabled the researcher to identify how language, culture, and environmental elements were interconnected within traditional game practices.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers to obtain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of traditional games. The interviews explored participants' knowledge of traditional games, their understanding of the linguistic expressions commonly used during gameplay, and the cultural values embedded in these activities. Participants were also asked to explain the meanings and functions of specific words, commands, and expressions used in the games, as well as their views on how traditional games contribute to cultural preservation, language maintenance, social interaction, and

environmental awareness. The interviews provided contextual information that complemented the observational data and facilitated a more comprehensive ecolinguistic analysis.

Third, document analysis was conducted on school records, activity reports, photographs, and other relevant materials related to traditional game activities. These documents were used to corroborate observational and interview findings and to provide additional information regarding the implementation and preservation of traditional games within the school environment.

The combination of observations, interviews, and document analysis enabled the researcher to capture linguistic expressions, discourse practices, cultural values, and ecological elements associated with traditional games from multiple perspectives. This triangulated approach enhanced the credibility and depth of the data collected for the study

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic and ecolinguistic analysis procedures. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting relevant linguistic and cultural data from observation transcripts, interview transcripts, and documentation records. Second, the data were coded and categorized into thematic groups, including local vocabulary, game-specific lexical items, commands and chants, discourse patterns, cultural values, and ecological references found in traditional game practices. Specifically, the coding process examined lexical items, speech acts, directives, game-related terminology, cultural symbols, and ecological discourses that emerged during gameplay and participant interviews.

Third, an ecolinguistic analysis was performed to interpret the interconnections between language, culture, and environment. Drawing on ecolinguistic principles proposed by Haugen (1972) and Stibbe (2015), the analysis focused on several linguistic units and ecolinguistic concepts, including lexical choices related to local culture and the environment, recurrent expressions and commands used during gameplay, patterns of interaction and cooperation among participants, cultural narratives embedded in game practices, and references to environmental elements such as natural spaces, materials, and ecological knowledge. Particular attention was given to how these linguistic features reflected relationships between humans, culture, and their surrounding environment, as well as how they contributed to the maintenance of local cultural identity.

Finally, conclusions were drawn by synthesizing the thematic and ecolinguistic findings to explain how traditional games functioned as ecological linguistic practices contributing to language maintenance and cultural sustainability. To enhance trustworthiness, methodological triangulation and member checking were applied to ensure the credibility, dependability, and consistency of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Traditional Games Identified in the School Context

The findings revealed that several traditional games were recognized and practiced by students at SMA Sains Tahfidz Qur'an Al-Ammar. The games identified included engklek, congklak, gobak sodor, egrang, petak umpet, and bentengan. Engklek is a hopping game in which players move through numbered squares drawn on the ground using one foot. Congklak is a traditional board game involving the distribution and collection of seeds or shells in a series of small pits. Gobak sodor is a team-based game in which players attempt to cross designated lines while avoiding opponents who guard them. Egrang is a game played using bamboo stilts that requires balance and coordination. Petak umpet is a hide-and-seek game in which players conceal themselves while one player searches for them. Bentengan is a team strategy game in which players defend their own base while attempting to capture the opponent's base.

Observation data indicated that traditional games were primarily performed in outdoor spaces such as school yards and open fields, which provided ecological settings where linguistic interactions occurred naturally. The games involved verbal coordination, rule explanation, negotiation, and spontaneous expressions, creating dynamic linguistic environments that reflected students' multilingual backgrounds.

Students Who Actively Play Traditional Games

Javanese Student (S-04, Female, Grade X):

English translation: "When I was still in my hometown, I often played engklek and congklak with friends after school. Engklek uses flat stones; we jump in boxes drawn on the ground. Congklak uses seeds and a wooden board. I still remember how to play them."

Batak Student (S-12, Male, Grade XI):

English translation: "In my village, a game similar to hide-and-seek is called marshillah. The difference is that marshillah is often played around gardens or areas with many trees. But after being at school, I learned that similar games exist in other regions with different names."

Sundanese Student (S-05, Female, Grade X):

English translation: "I know engklek, bentengan, and gobak sodor. When I was little in Bandung, I played bentengan with neighbors. We were divided into two teams. Each team has a fortress, could be a pole or a tree. The task is to guard the fortress and try to touch the opponent's fortress."

Batak Student (S-08, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "In my village, egrang is a must-play. Every boy can play egrang. I learned from my older brother."

Students with Limited or No Direct Experience

Malay Student (S-21, Female, Grade XII):

English translation: "I know gobak sodor and bentengan, but I've never played them directly. I saw them in internet videos or heard friends talk about them. At home, I more often play games on my phone. My parents are also busy, so they don't have time to teach traditional games."

Minangkabau Student (S-06, Male, Grade X):

English translation: "I know congklak from my mother. She often played it when she was little. But I myself have never played it. I think it's important to preserve culture."

Sundanese Student (S-28, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "I've heard of egrang, but I don't know how to play it. When I was little, I preferred playing soccer or online games. Traditional games are rarely played in my home environment."

Students Who Learned Traditional Games at School

Minangkabau Student (S-15, Female, Grade XI):

English translation: "Before entering this senior high school, I had never played gobak sodor. I learned it from the sports teacher in Grade X. Now, during free time, my friends and I sometimes play gobak sodor in the school yard. It's fun because it requires teamwork."

Batak Student (S-08, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "In extracurricular activities, we were taught various traditional games from our friends' regions. I learned engklek from a friend from Java, egrang from a friend from Betawi, and congklak from a teacher. We teach each other."

Linguistic Features in Traditional Game Practices

The analysis of linguistic data demonstrated that traditional games contained specific local lexical items used by students during gameplay. Terms such as *sodor*, *garis jaga*, *pangkalan*, *teklek*, and *benteng* were frequently used to describe roles, rules, and spatial boundaries in the games. Additionally, students from Batak and Malay backgrounds occasionally used regional expressions such as *marsiadapari* (mutual assistance) and *jaga giliran* (taking turns). These lexical items functioned as markers of local linguistic identity and facilitated communication within the gaming context.

During gameplay, students employed short imperative and exclamatory utterances to coordinate actions, such as "Guard the left side!", "Attack now!", "Change players!", "Watch out!", and "You're tagged!". These utterances were characterized by concise structures, rapid intonation, and context-dependent meanings. The discourse patterns reflected functional communication adapted to physical movement and social interaction, demonstrating how language use was shaped by the ecological context of play.

The findings also revealed that students used informal oral language styles characterized by elliptical sentences, repetition, and prosodic variation. Such language styles were influenced by the rhythm and dynamics of the games, illustrating the adaptive nature of spoken language in physical and social environments. This ecological adaptation of language highlighted the interdependence between linguistic form and the situational context of traditional play.

Batak Student (S-12, Male, Grade XI):

English translation: "There is a term 'marsiadapari' which means helping each other. When searching for hiding friends, we cooperate."

Javanese Student (S-04, Female, Grade X):

English translation: "Sometimes use Javanese terms like 'guard the base' or 'okay, take turns'. But more often use Indonesian so all friends understand."

Batak-Malay Student (S-07, Female, Grade X):

English translation: "Usually we shout 'Watch out!' or 'My turn!' Using Indonesian mixed with Batak sometimes."

Javanese Student (S-11, Female, Grade XI):

English translation: "Mixed. There are Javanese terms like 'mbok' to ask for a turn, but generally Indonesian."

Imperative and Exclamatory Utterances

Javanese Student (S-22, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "Usually we shout 'Guard the left!', 'Attack!', 'Change players!', 'Watch out!', 'Tagged!' So it's quick and friends immediately understand."

Cultural Values Embedded in Traditional Games

Traditional games such as *gobak sodor* and *bentengan* required teamwork and strategic coordination among players. Observational data indicated that students collaborated to defend territories, plan attacks, and support teammates. This cooperative behavior reflected cultural values of mutual assistance and collective responsibility embedded in traditional game practices.

Rules in traditional games encouraged students to acknowledge defeat or physical contact, promoting honesty and fairness. Students were observed admitting when they were tagged or when their team lost, which demonstrated the internalization of sportsmanship norms. These practices illustrated how traditional games functioned as informal socialization contexts for ethical behavior.

Several traditional games utilized natural materials and environmental spaces, such as stones and soil in *engklek* and bamboo stilts in *egrang*. The use of these materials reflected local ecological knowledge and the integration of natural resources into cultural practices. Students' interactions with the physical environment during gameplay illustrated the ecological dimension of traditional games.

Before and during gameplay, students displayed linguistic etiquette, including greeting peers, negotiating rules, and taking turns. These practices demonstrated culturally embedded norms of politeness and respect in communication, reinforcing the role of traditional games in social and linguistic socialization.

Mutual Cooperation

Sundanese Student (S-14, Male, Grade XI):

English translation: "Bentengan requires strategy and courage. Also trains the body. Cooperation is important. If you're selfish, the team will definitely lose."

Minangkabau Student (S-15, Female, Grade XI):

English translation: "Teamwork is number one. If we're not united, we will definitely lose. Also learning to accept defeat gracefully."

Sportsmanship and Honesty

Javanese Student (S-04, Female, Grade X):

English translation: "Cooperation, patience, and honesty. If you cheat, the game isn't fun."

Javanese Student (S-22, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "Sportsmanship. When playing, we have to be honest if we're touched. That teaches integrity."

Environmental Wisdom

Batak Student (S-08, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "Egrang uses bamboo, trains balance, courage, and patience. Also trains leg muscles."

Traditional Games as Domains of Language Maintenance

The findings indicated that traditional games provided contexts in which students spontaneously used local lexical items and expressions. Unlike formal classroom settings, gameplay encouraged informal and natural language use, enabling students to activate regional vocabulary and communicative strategies. This suggests that traditional games functioned as domains of language use that contribute to language maintenance.

Interview data revealed that teachers and older students often introduced traditional game terms and rules to younger participants. This process facilitated the transmission of linguistic and cultural knowledge across generations within the school environment. Such intergenerational interactions supported the continuity of local linguistic practices.

Traditional games required constant verbal interaction, including instruction, negotiation, and emotional expression. Participants reported that gameplay encouraged spontaneous speaking and social interaction. This finding supports the view that traditional games contribute to the development of oral communication competence and pragmatic language use.

Given the multicultural background of the students, traditional games served as spaces for multilingual interaction. Students exchanged vocabulary and cultural practices from different regions, creating a dynamic linguistic ecology within the school. This multilingual environment fostered mutual understanding and tolerance among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Intergenerational Transmission

Minangkabau Student (S-25, Female, Grade XII):

English translation: "Once with my grandmother. Grandmother taught me. Now grandmother is old, so I teach my younger sibling."

Javanese Student (S-22, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "I grew up with traditional games. Every afternoon I played gobak sodor or bentengan with friends in the neighborhood. I will teach my children later."

Multilingual Interaction and Cross-Cultural Exchange

Batak Student (S-20, Male, Grade XI):

English translation: "I have many friends from various regions. These games unite us."

Sundanese Student (S-19, Female, Grade XI):

English translation: "I learned the term 'teklek' for engklek from a Javanese friend."

Batak Student (S-08, Male, Grade XII):

English translation: "We teach each other. I learned engklek from a friend from Java, egrang from a friend from Betawi, and congklak from a teacher."

Ecolinguistic Interpretation of Traditional Games

From an ecolinguistic perspective, traditional games can be interpreted as linguistic ecosystems in which language, culture, and environment interact dynamically. The specific lexical items, discourse patterns, and social norms observed during gameplay were shaped by the ecological context of physical spaces, materials, and social relationships.

The linguistic expressions used during traditional games reflected social roles, power relations, and cooperative structures among players. Commands, prohibitions, and coordination strategies demonstrated how language mediated social organization within the game environment. Furthermore, the use of environmental elements in games illustrated how language practices were intertwined with ecological contexts.

The findings suggest that traditional games function as cultural practices that sustain linguistic and cultural knowledge. By engaging in traditional games, students participated in cultural practices that reinforced local identity, ecological awareness, and linguistic diversity. This highlights the potential of traditional games as educational resources for promoting language maintenance and cultural sustainability.

Discussion

Traditional Games within the Ecology of Language

The findings of this study support Haugen's (1972) concept of the ecology of language, which emphasizes the interdependence between language and its social and environmental contexts. Traditional games observed in this study functioned as ecological linguistic spaces in which language use was shaped by physical environments, social relationships, and cultural norms. The presence of specific game-related terminology, imperative discourse patterns, and informal oral styles demonstrates how linguistic practices adapt to ecological contexts of physical movement and social interaction.

This finding aligns with Fill and Mühlhäusler's (2001) assertion that language is embedded in ecological systems and cannot be separated from cultural and environmental contexts. Traditional games, therefore, can be conceptualized as micro-ecologies of language where linguistic forms, meanings, and functions are co-constructed through social and environmental interactions.

Language Socialization and Intergenerational Transmission

The study revealed that traditional games facilitate intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural knowledge through teacher–student and senior–junior interactions. This finding is consistent with Fishman's (1991) theory of language maintenance, which emphasizes the importance of cultural domains for intergenerational language transmission. Traditional games serve as informal domains where students acquire local vocabulary, discourse norms, and cultural practices through participation and observation.

Previous studies on language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012) have shown that children and adolescents acquire linguistic and cultural norms through everyday social practices. The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that traditional games in school settings function as significant language socialization contexts, particularly in multilingual environments. Unlike formal classroom instruction, traditional games provide spontaneous, emotionally engaging contexts that encourage active language use.

Cultural Values and Linguistic Practices

The results indicated that traditional games embedded cultural values such as cooperation, sportsmanship, honesty, and respect. These findings corroborate Indonesian cultural studies that highlight traditional games as vehicles for moral and social education (Sibarani, 2018). From an ecolinguistic perspective, these cultural values are not only social constructs but also part of the linguistic ecology that shapes discourse practices. For instance, cooperative strategies in games were accompanied by specific linguistic patterns such as inclusive pronouns, collective imperatives, and negotiation discourse, reflecting the integration of language and social values.

This study contributes to ecolinguistic theory by demonstrating how cultural values are encoded and enacted through everyday linguistic practices within ecological contexts. While previous ecolinguistic studies have focused primarily on environmental discourse and narratives (Stibbe, 2015), this research highlights play as a crucial domain for examining the relationship between language, culture, and ecology.

Traditional Games and Environmental Contexts

The findings also revealed that traditional games incorporate environmental elements such as natural materials and outdoor spaces, reflecting local ecological knowledge. This supports Mühlhäusler's (2003) argument that language practices are deeply connected to ecological knowledge systems. Traditional games involve spatial organization, natural resources, and environmental interaction, which are linguistically encoded through spatial terminology and material references.

By analyzing traditional games as ecological practices, this study extends ecolinguistic research beyond discourse analysis to embodied and material practices. This perspective contributes to a broader understanding of how language ecology operates not only in texts and discourse but also in embodied social activities.

Multilingualism and Linguistic Diversity in School Contexts

The multilingual background of students created a dynamic linguistic ecology where different regional languages and dialects intersected. Traditional games served as spaces for linguistic contact and negotiation, enabling students to exchange vocabulary and cultural knowledge. This finding aligns with sociolinguistic research on multilingual interaction and translanguaging in educational contexts.

However, the findings also suggest that Indonesian and global languages may dominate certain interactions, which could potentially marginalize local languages. This observation indicates that traditional games alone may not guarantee language maintenance; rather, they provide opportunities for local language use that must be supported by broader educational and sociocultural policies. This nuanced perspective challenges overly optimistic assumptions about the role of traditional games in language preservation.

Originality and Contribution of the Study

The originality of this study lies in its application of an ecolinguistic framework to traditional games within a formal educational context. While previous studies have documented traditional games from anthropological, pedagogical, and sociocultural perspectives, few have examined them as ecological linguistic practices. This study contributes empirical evidence that traditional games function as linguistic ecosystems where language, culture, and environment interact dynamically.

Moreover, this research extends ecolinguistic theory by incorporating embodied practices and play into the ecology of language framework. By demonstrating that traditional games are

domains of language use and cultural transmission, this study bridges the gap between ecolinguistics, sociolinguistics, and educational linguistics.

Implications for Linguistics and Education

The findings have several implications for linguistic theory and educational practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study supports the view that language ecology should include everyday embodied practices such as play, not only discourse and narratives. This broadens the scope of ecolinguistic research and highlights the importance of examining diverse domains of language use.

From an educational perspective, integrating traditional games into school curricula could promote linguistic diversity, cultural awareness, and communicative competence. Traditional games can serve as pedagogical tools for enhancing oral communication skills, fostering cooperative learning, and strengthening students' cultural identities. However, the integration of traditional games should be accompanied by explicit linguistic and cultural instruction to maximize their potential for language maintenance.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single school context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative design focused on descriptive and interpretive analysis without quantitative measurement of language use frequency. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches to quantify linguistic usage patterns in traditional games and compare them across different regions and educational settings.

Additionally, further studies could explore the role of digital media and modern adaptations of traditional games in language ecology, examining how digital environments reshape linguistic and cultural practices. Comparative studies between traditional and digital games could provide insights into the transformation of language ecology in contemporary societies.

Alignment and Contradiction with Previous Studies

The findings of this study largely align with previous research on language socialization, cultural transmission, and ecolinguistics. However, this study diverges from some cultural preservation narratives by emphasizing that traditional games alone do not automatically ensure language maintenance. Instead, they function as ecological opportunities that require institutional and community support to sustain linguistic diversity. This critical perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language ecology and challenges deterministic views of cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the ecolinguistic dimensions of traditional games as a strategy for preserving local language and cultural practices among students at SMA Sains Tahfidz Qur'an Al-Ammar. By examining the linguistic expressions, cultural meanings, and ecological values embedded in traditional games, the research addressed the central question of how these practices contribute to linguistic and cultural sustainability in contemporary educational contexts. The findings demonstrate that traditional games function not merely as recreational activities but also as dynamic linguistic and cultural ecosystems that transmit local knowledge, environmental awareness, and social values across generations.

The results indicate that the use of traditional games in educational settings enhances students' engagement with local languages and reinforces their cultural identity. Linguistic forms embedded in game instructions, chants, and interactions reflect ecological relationships and local worldviews, confirming that language and environment are mutually constitutive. Moreover, the integration of traditional games into formal learning environments offers a pedagogical framework that bridges indigenous knowledge systems with modern education, thereby supporting holistic language preservation efforts.

This research contributes theoretically to ecolinguistic studies by providing empirical evidence of how language ecology operates within cultural practices and educational institutions. It also offers practical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers who seek culturally responsive and ecologically grounded teaching strategies. By positioning traditional games as linguistic and cultural resources, this study highlights their potential role in sustaining endangered linguistic practices and strengthening students' awareness of their cultural and ecological heritage.

However, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single educational institution, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other sociocultural contexts. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the data, while rich in depth, does not allow for broad statistical generalization. Future research could involve comparative studies across different regions, quantitative measurements of language use outcomes, and longitudinal investigations to assess the long-term impact of traditional game-based interventions on language maintenance and cultural resilience.

In conclusion, traditional games represent a vital ecolinguistic resource that connects language, culture, and environment within educational practices. Their systematic incorporation into school curricula can serve as a sustainable strategy for preserving local languages and cultural traditions in an era of rapid globalization and linguistic homogenization.

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