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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural preservation through digital literacy: A study of the digital transformation of children's books

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the digital transformation of children's literature, highlighting the challenges of preserving local cultural knowledge amidst an increasingly standardized digital environment. Drawing upon the interdisciplinary frameworks of multimodality and culturally responsive pedagogy, this research investigates how children's digital enrichment books articulate the representation and preservation of local wisdom. Employing a multimodal analysis approach, the study examines 22 books sourced from the BUDI platform of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to uncover their verbal, visual, compositional, and cultural elements. The findings reveal seven domains of local wisdom actively integrated within the narratives. Furthermore, the interplay between text and visuals demonstrates how intersemiotic relationships form six distinct patterns that support cultural preservation mechanisms, such as documentation, contextualization, and the transmission of collective memory. By synthesizing these findings into a conceptual model, this research underscores that digital preservation relies not solely on technological sophistication, but rather on the depth and cross-modal integration of cultural knowledge. Ultimately, this study contributes an original framework for evaluating and developing culturally rooted digital reading materials for primary education.

Keywords: cultural preservation; digital literacy; local wisdom; multimodality; children's literature.

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INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation in global education has fundamentally altered the reading ecology of children, functioning as a bridge that connects technological advancement with the sociocultural perceptions of early readers. The shift from print dominance to screen-based multimodal formats is not merely a technical change in information distribution (Kress, 2010; Walsh, 2010). Rather, it represents a systematic restructuring of how children interpret visuals, understand narratives, and construct knowledge about their world. In this context, supplementary reading or non-textbooks are viewed as dynamic entities that transcend the function of formal instructional materials (Short, 2018; Stephens, 2018). Reading books emerge as coherent sign systems for literacy development, character building, value enculturation, and the transmission of local wisdom, effectively bridging basic literacy competencies with cultural heritage.

In relation to the digital reading landscape, the fields of multimodal literacy and cultural pedagogy offer profound insights into how digital storybooks operate as complex semiotic systems. This approach conceptualizes digital books as orchestrations of various representational modes such as verbal language, illustrations, typography, color, and layout that collectively generate representational, interactional, and compositional meanings (Jewitt, 2008; Serafini, 2014). From this perspective, cultural value is not merely read through written text but is actively constructed through visual aesthetics and spatial organization. Children's books serve as social spaces where children build agency and cultural identity (Kucirkova, 2019; Stephens, 2018). Therefore, the presence of authentic local wisdom within the digital ecosystem is crucial to prevent dissonance between children's everyday experiences and the narratives they consume.

Research on literacy and digital reading is not only globally relevant but also highly urgent for application to specific national contexts. In Indonesia, digitalization expands access to reading materials while concurrently introducing sociocultural vulnerabilities, particularly the potential homogenization of narratives resulting from the dominance of global content (Bradford, 2007; Buckingham, 2013). In response, the presence of the Buku Digital, Gerakan Literasi Nasional (BUDI) platform by the Language Development and Guidance Agency (2024) provides an inclusive space containing thousands of reading materials themed around diversity, folklore, arts, and regional languages. The BUDI catalog offers a fertile ground for multimodal literacy studies, as the narratives within it do not

merely tell stories but actively participate in preserving cultural knowledge and Indonesian local identity amidst the currents of globalization.

Despite the growing interest in digital literacy, research that specifically addresses the preservation of local wisdom through the multimodal landscapes of children's digital books remains quite limited. Global discourse development reveals diverse thematic polarizations. Several recent international studies are predominantly oriented toward technocentric and psychometric aspects (Bus et al., 2017; Kucirkova, 2019; Merchant, 2015). In research landscapes involving multicultural urban societies, the focus often shifts to issues of race, social justice, and critical pedagogy (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2013). Meanwhile, in regions with strong oral traditions, the utilization of digital platforms focuses on revitalizing traditional literature to overcome the limitations of print materials (Batchelor, 2017; Norton, 2014). Furthermore, comparative education research globally tends to highlight information technology integration in curricula and media adaptations of folklore (Kim & Anderson, 2018; Lim & Toh, 2020; Pang, 2020). These various studies demonstrate that digital literacy and cultural preservation are frequently situated in separate discourses. In Indonesia itself, the national digital book transformation is still most often discussed in terms of infrastructure and distribution. Few studies have critically examined the national repository of children's digital supplementary books as both a pedagogical medium and an agent of local wisdom preservation.

This study aims to investigate how the corpus of children's digital supplementary books within the official BUDI catalog articulates cultural and multimodal dimensions, with an emphasis on the interaction between technological innovation and local wisdom preservation. To comprehend this phenomenon, this research proposes an interdisciplinary framework combining multimodal theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) with culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Through this framework, visual and textual elements in digital books are positioned not simply as aesthetic ornaments, but as ideological and cultural markers that configure the collective memory and ecological ethics of society (Fairclough, 2003; Stephens, 2018). Beyond analyzing patterns of local wisdom representation, this study elucidates the multimodal dynamics of digital narratives and formulates a conceptual model for integrating local wisdom-based digital literacy.

By foregrounding the interdisciplinary dimensions of the national digital book repository, this study contributes to enriching the discourse on children's literature and multimodal literacy in developing nations. The novelty of this study affirms that digital

technology can be optimized to strengthen local culture without succumbing to global homogenization. Practically, the findings are expected to provide a comprehensive framework for policymakers, authors, illustrators, and educators in designing and integrating digital non-textbooks. Through the synergy of digital innovation and cultural awareness, this research positions digital books as an essential meeting space among technology, pedagogy, and culture, thereby ensuring the sustainability of local knowledge for Indonesia's younger generation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a Multimodal Analysis design to examine the representation of local wisdom, verbal–visual relations, and cultural preservation mechanisms in children's digital books. This approach was selected because meaning in digital books is established not merely through verbal text, but through the dynamic interplay of illustrations, color, typography, layout, character gestures, and visual sequencing. The multimodal analysis draws upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework specifically focusing on representational, interactional, and compositional meanings alongside Serafini's (2014) multimodal reading perspective. To interpret the cultural dimensions, the study integrates culturally sustaining pedagogy, which views community languages, practices, knowledge, and values as vital elements to be maintained and fostered in education (Paris & Alim, 2017). Combining these two frameworks allows this research to delineate multimodal meaning structures while evaluating how digital books sustain and transmit local cultural identities.

The primary data source consists of digital books accessible on the Buku Digital Gerakan Literasi Nasional (BUDI) platform, published by the Language Development and Guidance Agency, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen). An initial inventory identified 211 titles aligned with the general scope of the study. The corpus was subsequently established through purposive sampling using four criteria: (1) publicly accessible digital supplementary reading or non-textbooks; (2) targeted at emergent and early readers at the primary education level; (3) containing explicit representations of Indonesian (Nusantara) local wisdom, particularly across themes of folklore, cultural diversity, traditional cuisine arts, folk games, and regional languages; and (4) officially published through the national book publishing system. Through this screening process, 22 digital books were selected as the primary research corpus.

Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively through several sequential phases. The initial phase involved cataloging and selecting the corpus based on the inclusion criteria. The selected corpus was then segmented into analytical units of single pages or spreads, followed by preliminary coding of local wisdom elements. The next phase examined multimodal configurations across representational, interactional, and compositional dimensions. The analysis then addressed verbal–visual intersemiotic relations to determine how text and images reinforce, complement, extend, or foreground meanings.

Findings from this analysis were grouped to identify broader patterns of cultural representation and the underlying mechanisms of local wisdom preservation in digital books. Interpretations were made by examining how cultural elements are introduced, narrated, visualized, and contextualized within specific social settings. In the final stage, all findings were synthesized into a conceptual model of local wisdom–based digital literacy integration, illustrating the relationships among cultural representation, multimodal configuration, and cultural preservation in children's digital literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified 211 digital book titles on the Ministry of Education and Culture's BUDI website that fell within the study's initial scope. Based on thematic mapping, 137 titles relate to folklore, 39 titles focus on cuisine, 23 titles address diversity, and 12 titles represent local wisdom through traditional games and regional languages. This distribution indicates that BUDI not only functions as a repository for digital reading materials but also provides a space for representing various forms of cultural knowledge from the Indonesian archipelago. This aligns with BUDI's function as a digital platform for sharing, reading, and providing literary works to the public (Language Development and Guidance Agency, 2024).

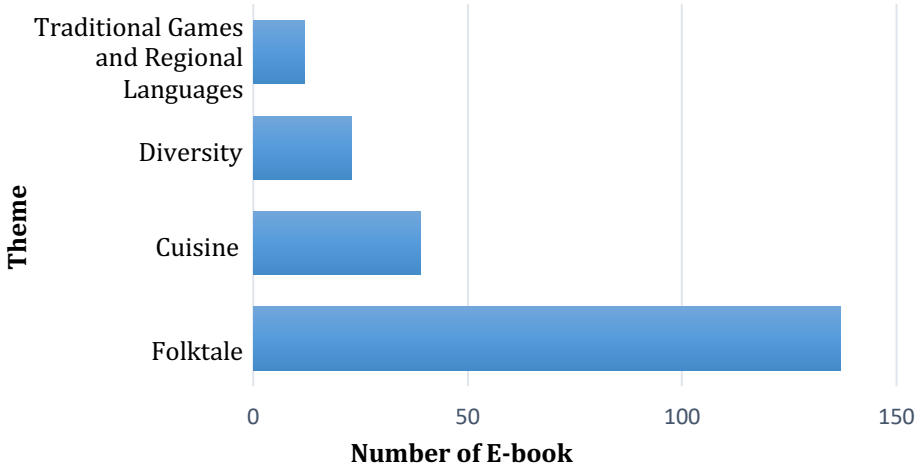


Figure 1. Distribution of Digital Books Meeting the Criteria on the BUDI Website

Not the entire population was used as the unit of analysis. Through purposive sampling, books were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly their representation of folklore, traditions and rituals, games, artifacts, cuisine, ecological knowledge, local languages, and the social life of the community. Based on this process, 22 digital books were selected as the main corpus for the study.

Code	Book Title	The Setting of the Story	Cultural Representation
B01	*Bermain Sapintrong, Yuk!* (Inong, 2023)	West Java	The Sapintrong Game
B02	*Gerubak Takung* (Wibowo, 2022)	Lampung	The Gerubak Takung Game
B03	*Dudung Suka Balap Karung* (Ambarwati, 2023)	Indonesia	The Sack Race
B04	*Motor Bambu Ranu* (Maya, 2023)	South Sulawesi	Bamboo Motorcycles and the Latimojong Festival
B05	*Satu, Dua, Tiga, Tarik!* (Ross, 2023)	Indonesia	The Upih Tug-of-War
B06	*Kamanippah Leluhur Orang Enggano* (Wibowo, 2016)	Bengkulu	Legends of the Origins of the Enggano People
B07	*Ana Halo* (Fedinandus, 2016)	East Nusa Tenggara	Folktales and Social Values
B08	*Dauppare* (Arisnawati, 2016)	Toraja	Legends and Moral Values
B09	*Kain Kulit Kayu Dei* (Rahmah, 2018)	Central Sulawesi	Bark Cloth and Traditional Rituals
B10	*Mengenal Kuliner dari Pulau Buton* (Rahmawati, 2018)	Southeast Sulawesi	Buton Cuisine and Traditions
B11	*Dua Potong Gorengan* (Setyaningsih, 2019)	Indonesia/Java	Cuisine, Greetings, and Social Values
B12	*Serunya Permainan Tradisional Anak Zaman Dulu* (Supriyono, 2018)	Indonesia	Traditional Games
B13	*Siti Tedak Siten* (Indriyana, 2020)	Central Java	The Tedak Siten Ritual
B14	*Nyadran-Belajar Toleransi pada Tradisi* (Nurhidayati, 2020)	Central Java	The Nyadran Tradition
B15	*Fao Si Pelompat Batu* (Situmorang, 2019)	Nias	The Fahombo Tradition
B16	*Noken Kebanggaan Kami* (Aulia, 2019)	Papua	Noken
B17	*Damar Kurung Persahabatan* (Maya, 2022)	East Java	Damar Kurung
B18	*Penabuh Gong* (Saptorini, 2021)	Central Java	Gamelan and Wayang
B19	*Salam Sawu* (Ideo, 2019)	East Nusa Tenggara	Traditional Greetings
B20	*Mengenal Bubur Tradisional Nusantara* (Oktavianawati, 2018)	Nusantara	Traditional Cuisine
B21	*Sagu dari Seram* (Norrattri, 2019)	Maluku	Sago Processing
B22	*Mainan dari Alam* (Tamam, 2019)	Indonesia	Natural-Material Toys

Table 1. Featured Digital Book Profiles

The selected corpus exhibits relatively broad geographic diversity. Javanese cultural representation is evident through the sapintrong game in West Java (Inong, 2023), the Tedak Siten and Nyadran traditions in Central Java (Indriyana, 2020; Nurhidayati, 2020), the damar kurung tradition in Gresik (Maya, 2022), as well as gamelan and wayang (Saptorini, 2021). Sumatra is represented through the legends of the Enggano people (Wibowo, 2016) and the Gerubak Takung game from Lampung (Wibowo, 2022), while Sulawesi is represented by the

Latimojong bamboo motorcycle (Maya, 2023), the Dauppare legend from Toraja (Arisnawati, 2016), the bark cloth of the Kulawi people (Rahmah, 2018), and the traditions and cuisine of Buton Island (Rahmawati, 2018).

These representations also extend to eastern Indonesia through the traditional greeting of the Sawu people in East Nusa Tenggara (Ideo, 2019), the Papuan noken (Aulia, 2019), and the sago processing knowledge of the Seram people in Maluku (Norrattri, 2019). A number of books do not focus exclusively on a single region but highlight practices that are more widely recognized, such as sack races (Ambarwati, 2023), tarik upih (Ross, 2023), traditional children's games (Supriyono, 2018), Indonesian cuisine (Oktavianawati, 2018), and the use of natural materials as toys (Tamam, 2019).

This mapping demonstrates that locality is not merely established through the naming of a region. Rather, cultural identity is constructed through the interplay of geographical space, actions, artifacts, rituals, food, language, the environment, and patterns of social relations. These findings align with the concept of intangible cultural heritage in the UNESCO Convention (2003), which does not separate practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills from the objects, artifacts, instruments, and accompanying cultural spaces. Thus, the culture represented in the corpus is more accurately understood as an ecology of knowledge, rather than merely a collection of cultural symbols.

Further analysis identifies seven main domains of local wisdom representation, namely: traditional games and play culture; folktales, legends, and collective memory; traditions, rituals, and social practices; arts, crafts, and artifacts; cuisine and food knowledge; ecological knowledge and interaction with nature; and language, gestures, and social values. These seven domains are not mutually exclusive, as a single book can construct multiple cultural dimensions simultaneously.

Traditional Games as Culture and Social Knowledge

The representation of traditional games in the corpus extends beyond simply introducing game titles; it encompasses materials, rules, bodily movements, interpersonal interactions, and sequential stages of play. Bermain Sapintrong, Yuk! introduces sapintrong as a West Javanese game played with linked rubber bands while preserving the local term lasut (Inong, 2023). Gerubak Takung depicts children collecting takung fronds to use as play equipment (Wibowo, 2022), whereas Satu, Dua, Tiga, Tarik! introduces tarik upih, a game utilizing fallen areca or palm fronds (Ross, 2023).

A more procedural representation is evident in Motor Bambu Ranu. Rather than merely introducing the bamboo motorcycle, the book illustrates the entire sequence of finding and selecting suitable bamboo, cutting, transporting, carving frame components, and assembling them, ultimately embedding the game within the annual racing tradition of the Latimojong community in Enrekang (Maya, 2023). Similarly, Serunya Permainan Tradisional Anak Zaman Dulu details equipment, rules, local terminology, strategies, cooperation, and gameplay mechanics for egrang (stilts), gasing (spinning tops), gobak sodor, and pletokan (Supriyono, 2018). Meanwhile, Dudung Suka Balap Karung frames sack racing within the context of Independence Day celebrations, outlining competition rules from the starting line to the finish (Ambarwati, 2023).

These data reveal two primary patterns of presentation. First, games are constructed through characters' actions and lived experiences. Second, games are introduced through informative expositions covering names, origins, equipment, rules, and procedures. This distinction is significant, as it demonstrates that traditional games can be represented both as formal objects of knowledge and as enacted social practices.

This dual character is particularly evident in Motor Bambu Ranu. The cultural value of the bamboo motorcycle arises not only from the physical object itself, but from the dynamic relationship among bamboo as a locally sourced material, craftsmanship, bodily engagement, collaborative effort, and communal racing traditions. As such, the game operates as a repository of both "knowing what" and "knowing how." A UNESCO (2003) perspective offers a valuable lens for interpreting this finding: the sustainability of cultural heritage depends not merely on the preservation of cultural artifacts, but on the intergenerational transmission of the knowledge and skills that allow these practices to be continuously re-enacted.

Folktales, Legends, and Collective Memory

Folktales and legends within the corpus connect historical narratives to kinship structures, geographical space, social life, and communal memory. *Kamanippah Leluhur Orang Enggano* recounts the ancestry of the Enggano people, directly linking it to the existence of five indigenous tribes: Kaahoa, Kaitora, Kaarubi, Kauno, and Kaaruba (Wibowo, 2016). In this context, the legend functions not merely as a tale, but as a repository of the community's genealogical memory.

Ana Halo portrays communal life in East Nusa Tenggara through agricultural practices and cooperation (gotong royong) (Ferdinandus, 2016), whereas Dauppare anchors the

legend of Batu Baine in parent–child relationships, the grief of loss, and the consequences of human action (Arisnawati, 2016). These narratives demonstrate that the function of folklore extends far beyond preserving plotlines of the past. Instead, these stories organize memory, social experience, familial bonds, space, and value orientations, granting readers access to the relational web that imbues the narrative with cultural significance.

These findings concurrently highlight the crucial role of context in cultural representation. De Bruijn (2019) cautions that folklore in intercultural education can become reductive if used merely as a simplistic representation of a particular group. Within this study's corpus, that risk is mitigated as the narratives are deeply grounded in social life, family dynamics, geographical landscapes, regional language, and communal values. Consequently, the quality of cultural representation is not primarily determined by the sheer quantity of local symbols displayed, but by the density of the contextual relationships woven around them.

Traditions, Rituals, and Social Practices

The representation of traditions and rituals encompasses stages of enactment, material objects, social actors, communal spaces, and the symbolic meanings accompanying these practices. *Siti Tedak Siten* illustrates the turun tanah (stepping-on-the-earth) ceremony using seven-colored jadah (glutinous rice cakes), sugarcane ladders, decorative cages, sungkem (reverent prostration), and objects selected by the child. The book moves beyond merely visualizing the procession by offering explanations regarding the symbolic significance of several ritual elements (Indriyana, 2020).

Nyadran: Belajar Toleransi pada Tradisi portrays grave-cleaning activities, pilgrimages (ziarah), communal feasts (kenduri), shared meals, and intergenerational dialogue. These practices are intimately linked to values of togetherness, tolerance, and cooperation (gotong royong) (Nurhidayati, 2020). Meanwhile, *Fao si Pelompat Batu* constructs the Fahombo (stone-jumping) tradition through a child's lived experience within the social fabric of the Nias community, explicitly clarifying that not all Nias men are stone jumpers (Situmorang, 2019). Such clarification is significant as it counteracts tendencies toward cultural stereotyping.

Together, these three books demonstrate that traditions are framed not as static ceremonies from the past, but as living social practices sustained through family, community, language, action, and shared systems of meaning. This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2003), which conceptualizes intangible cultural heritage as being transmitted across

generations while continually recreated by communities in relation to their environment and history. Thus, the preservation of tradition cannot be achieved merely by maintaining the outward form of a ritual; it must equally encompass the knowledge surrounding its practitioners, procedures, social contexts, and underlying philosophy.

Art, Crafts, and Artifacts as Material Knowledge

The representation of arts, crafts, and artifacts within the corpus encompasses the physical forms of the objects, raw materials, production processes, social functions, and intergenerational relationships in the transmission of skills. *Kain Kulit Kayu Dei* features the bark cloth of the Kulawi community, detailing the materials, tools, and production stages, as well as its utilization in both everyday life and traditional ceremonies (Rahmah, 2018). This craftsmanship is concurrently constructed through the dynamic relationship between Grandmother Ola and the younger generation.

Noken Kebanggaan Kami presents the noken (woven bag) by emphasizing its crafting materials and its functional role within Papuan society (Aulia, 2019). *Damar Kurung Persahabatan* connects the creation of the damar kurung (traditional lantern) to cross-generational interaction and cultural festivals (Maya, 2022), whereas *Penabuh Gong* portrays the gong within the broader ecosystem of gamelan and wayang performances, while simultaneously highlighting the learning process between a young protagonist and older generations (Saptorini, 2021).

These findings demonstrate that artifacts function as far more than mere material objects. *Kain Kulit Kayu Dei*, for instance, contextualizes the cloth within a web of relationships involving materials, tools, ritual functions, issues of material scarcity, and the transmission of skills. Consequently, the cultural value of an object resides in the network of knowledge regarding its makers, its production processes, its practical applications, and the lineage through which the requisite skills are passed down. Artifacts thus emerge as the nexus where materiality, technical knowledge, social function, the environment, and intergenerational continuity intersect.

Cuisine, Food Knowledge, and Local Ecology

The representation of culinary arts encompasses the names of dishes, raw ingredients, preparation processes, textures, food-producing environments, and the social contexts of

their presentation. *Mengenal Bubur Tradisional Nusantara* introduces various types of porridge along with their ingredients, textures, preparation methods, and consumption contexts. Bubur gunting, for instance, is explained using glutinous rice flour, pandan, salt, and coconut milk, as well as its presentation as a dish for breaking the fast (Oktavianawati, 2018).

Mengenal Kuliner dari Pulau Buton links food to the rocky ecological conditions of Buton Island, the utilization of cassava and marine resources, and the traditions of Pekakande-kandea, Haroa, and Pedole-dole (Rahmawati, 2018). *Sagu dari Seram* reveals an even closer relationship between food and the environment by detailing the habitat of sago palms, the selection of trees readies for harvest, the pounding process, and the final preparation into food (Norrattri, 2019).

These data demonstrate that culinary knowledge does not exist in isolation from ecological knowledge. A similar pattern is evident in *Motor Bambu Ranu, Gerubak Takung,* and *Mainan dari Alam*, which illustrate the use of bamboo, fronds, leaves, twigs, and seeds as materials for cultural activities (Maya, 2023; Tamam, 2019; Wibowo, 2022). The environment in these books is not merely a visual backdrop, but rather a source of both material and knowledge that enables culture to be practiced.

The interconnectedness among food, games, crafts, and ecology indicates that local wisdom is inherently relational. Knowledge regarding sago, for example, simultaneously encompasses its habitat, plant selection, processing skills, sustenance, and the community's lived practices. Therefore, ecological representation in digital books possesses the potential to preserve not only information about natural resources but also the ways in which communities organize their social and material relationships with the environment.

Language, Gestures, and Social Values

Local wisdom also manifests through everyday language, forms of address, bodily gestures, and social interactions. *Salam Sawu* introduces the traditional greeting of the Sawu people, which is performed by bringing faces close and pressing noses together. The verbal text explains the action, while the illustrations depict body positioning, facial proximity, direction of movement, and character expressions (Ideo, 2019). In this context, cultural knowledge cannot be fully preserved solely through verbal definition, as its gestural form is an intrinsic part of the knowledge itself.

Local terminology is found across various books, such as lasut in the game of sapintrong (Inong, 2023), Ya'ahowu within the context of Nias culture (Situmorang, 2019),

and kau java and kau sau as local terms for cassava in Buton (Rahmawati, 2018). *Dua Potong Gorengan* employs the traditional form of address “Mbah” (elder/grandparent) and links it to a child's sequence of actions: taking food without permission, feeling guilty, and subsequently apologizing (Setyaningsih, 2019).

These findings demonstrate that local wisdom is not exclusively located in grand rituals or iconic artifacts but is also embedded within the micro-practices of everyday life. The perspective of culturally sustaining pedagogy is highly relevant in interpreting this pattern, as the language, literacy, and cultural practices of a community are viewed as vital resources that must be sustained within education (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Therefore, preserving local terminology in books is not merely a matter of enriching vocabulary; rather, it provides a crucial space for the unique ways a community names, categorizes, and comprehends its world.

Overall, these seven domains indicate that local wisdom in children's digital books is constructed through six interrelated components: forms, practices, contexts, language, meaning, and values. The seven domains help identify cultural manifestations, while the six components elucidate the underlying knowledge structures. The depth of cultural representation, consequently, depends upon the book's capacity to interconnect these elements through both verbal and visual resources.

Multimodal Configurations and Verbal–Visual Relationships in Cultural Preservation

Analysis of the representational, interactional, and compositional dimensions reveals that language and visuals do not function as isolated channels of information. Rather, they possess distinct semiotic capacities and construct different forms of cultural knowledge. This finding aligns with multimodal approaches that conceptualize meaning as the orchestration of diverse semiotic resources (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt, 2008; Serafini, 2014). Within the context of picture books, word–image relations form a complex configuration, as both modes can reinforce, extend, or direct meaning through their respective representational capacities (Serafini, 2024).

In terms of the representational dimension, *Motor Bambu Ranu* portrays culture as a dynamic process. The text narrates the actions of selecting, cutting, and assembling bamboo, while the illustrations depict material forms, tools, bodily postures, the division of labor, and the environmental setting where these activities take place (Maya, 2023). The illustrations allow knowledge regarding "what" an object looks like and "how" an action is executed to be

conveyed simultaneously, thereby eliminating the need for all information to be explicitly stated through words.



Figure 2. Verbal–Visual Procedural Relationships in Corpus B04, Maya (2023: 9–10)
Figure A shows the cutting and tying of bamboo; Figure B shows the process of drilling holes in bamboo.

This case differs from Siti Tedak Siten. Although illustrations can depict the decorative cage, the objects, and the ritual procession, the visual forms do not inherently explain the underlying philosophy of these items. Verbal language assumes an explanatory function by anchoring symbolic meaning to the visible objects (Indriyana, 2020). This distinction affirms that the contributions of text and visuals are complementary rather than substitutive. This aligns with Callow (2020), who demonstrates that verbal–visual relations in picture books can be equivalent, mutually extending, or even generate distinct information.

In terms of the interactional dimension, Salam Sawu demonstrates the role of visual distance, bodily posture, gaze direction, facial expressions, and physical proximity. While the text explicitly mentions the act of pressing noses together, the visuals provide crucial information regarding how the body moves and how interpersonal relationships are constructed through the action (Ideo, 2019).



Figure 3. Gestural Representation in the Corpus B19, Ideo (2019: 13)

A similar configuration emerges when child characters are positioned ongoing cultural practices. Expressions of curiosity, joy, fear, awe, or confusion frame culture within the context of interpersonal experience, rather than merely as a distanced object of documentation. However, these configurations cannot be used to infer actual reader responses, as this study did not involve children as participants. What can be stated is that the visual design provides a vantage point that allows cultural practices to be constructed as an integral part of the characters' social and affective experiences.

These findings also expand the concept of preservation toward a form of embodied knowledge. In *Salam Sawu*, for instance, what must be preserved is not merely the name and definition of the greeting, but also the way bodies interact and convey respect. This implies that specific aspects of cultural knowledge reside precisely in gestures, bodily orientation, interpersonal distance, and actions that cannot be fully represented through words alone.

In terms of the compositional dimension, elements such as size, placement, salience, framing, color, and reading paths determine which cultural elements receive primary attention (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Painter et al., 2013). In *Siti Tedak Siten*, the decorative cage appears visually dominant before the text on the subsequent page explains the ritual's function and philosophy. The visuals preserve the physical appearance of the object,

whereas language preserves the layers of meaning that cannot be deduced from its physical form alone.

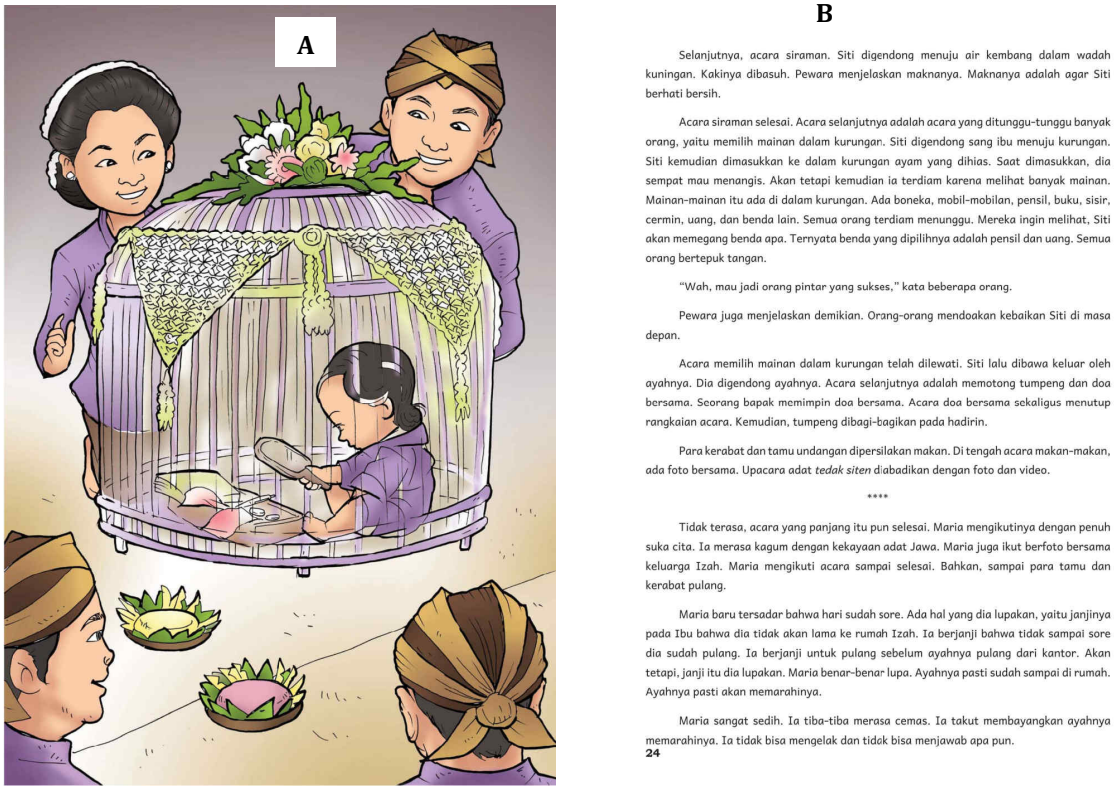


Figure 4. Symbolic Anchoring in *Siti Tedak Siten* Corpus B13, Indriyana (2020: 23–24)
Figure A highlights the cage as a visual object; Figure B provides a verbal explanation of the function and meaning of the ritual stages.

Thus, page organization is not merely a matter of aesthetics. Positioning the damar kurung, or ritual objects as visually dominant elements assigns specific representational weight and directs the reader's attention toward these cultural artifacts. In procedural books, page sequencing also functions as a temporal device, as each page can sustain one stage of action before advancing to the next.

Furthermore, the analysis of verbal–visual relations yield six intersemiotic patterns: reinforcement, complementation, sequential-procedural, explanation of symbolic meaning, explanation of local terminology, and affective-narrative. This categorization conceptually aligns with studies on text–image relations, which demonstrate that verbal and visual resources can construct distinct semantic relationships based on their respective contributions to the production and extension of meaning (Martinec & Salway, 2005; Liu & O'Halloran, 2009; Royce, 2007).

Pattern	Characteristics	Corpus	Preservation Function	Preservation Mechanism
Reinforcement	Images depict actions or objects described in the text	B02, B03, B16, B20, B22	Menegaskan bentuk dan penggunaan budaya	Dokumentasi bentuk

Pattern	Characteristics	Corpus	Preservation Function	Preservation Mechanism
Supplementation	Visuals add context, clothing, materials, expressions, and spatial relationships	B09, , B15, B16, B17, B18, B19, B21	Preserving the social-material context	Contextualization
Sequential-procedural	The text, images, and page sequence collectively illustrate the stages of a practice	B01, B04, B05, B09, B12, B21	Transmitting practical knowledge	Transmission of procedures
Explanation of meaning	Images depict objects or processes, while the text explains the philosophy and meaning that cannot be understood from the visuals alone	B13, B14, B15, B18	Preserving philosophy and symbolic systems	Preservation of meaning
Explanation of local terms	Local terms or expressions are introduced through text and linked to actions or the context of their use	B01, B12, B13, B14, B15, B19	Preserving linguistic elements	Linguistic preservation
Affective-narrative	Culture is embedded in family, friendship, conflict, and emotions	B03, B05, B06, B07, B08, B11, B17,	Linking cultural memory to social experience	Transmission of values and memory

Table 2. Intersemiotic Relations, Preservation Functions, and Preservation Mechanisms

In the reinforcement pattern, language and illustrations present relatively aligned information so that the name of an object or action can be directly linked to its visual referent. This pattern is found in B02, B03, B16, B20, and B22, among others. This relationship closely resembles Callow's (2020) equivalent relationship and primarily functions to document cultural forms and uses. Its preservation capacity, however, is relatively limited if both modes merely reiterate the same information.

The complementation pattern demonstrates a more complex capacity. In B09, B15, B16, B17, B18, B19, and B21, visuals can add information such as clothing, materials, environments, gestures, or spatial relationships when the text focuses more on the storyline. This relationship aligns with the concept of intersemiotic complementarity, a condition where verbal and visual resources mutually provide the necessary information to construct a more holistic multimodal meaning (Royce, 2007; Martinec & Salway, 2005). In the context of preservation, this pattern functions to maintain the socio-material context in which culture is practiced.

The sequential-procedural pattern is found in B01, B04, B05, B09, B12, and B21. Text, images, and page sequencing work in tandem to demonstrate how an object is made or

practice is executed. This pattern is clear in *Motor Bambu Ranu*, *Sagu dari Seram*, *Kain Kulit Kayu Dei*, and several books on traditional games. Its preservative value lies in the transmission of "knowing how," rather than merely "knowing what." From a UNESCO (2003) perspective, cultural sustainability indeed relies on the ability to pass down skills and processes, not just the documentation of end products.

In the explanation of symbolic meaning pattern, visuals present an object or procession, while the text explains the philosophy, function, or value system that cannot be discerned through form alone. This pattern is found in B13, B14, B15, and B18. Representations of Tedak Siten and Nyadran highlight the importance of this function. Without the verbal layer, illustrations potentially preserve only the surface of the ritual, while the cultural reasoning that makes the practice meaningful to its community could be lost.

The explanation of local terminology occurs when language itself becomes the preserved cultural element. Terms such as Ya'ahowu, lasut, names of foods, games, and ritual terminology are not merely written but linked to actions or contexts of use. This pattern appears in B01, B12, B13, B14, B15, and B19. The perspective of culturally sustaining pedagogy asserts the importance of linguistic sustainability as an integral part of sustaining cultural practices and community identities (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Visual and narrative contexts help these terms maintain their social functions, rather than merely appearing as exotic vocabulary.

The sixth pattern, affective-narrative, links culture to emotional and social experiences. Local objects, practices, and values are presented through friendship, family, conflict, loss, mistakes, and problem-solving. This pattern is found in B03, B05, B06, B07, B08, B11, and B17. *Damar Kurung Persahabatan*, for example, situates cultural artifacts within the experience of friendship, while *Ana Halo* and *Dauppare* integrate social values into family and community relations. Consequently, cultural values are not delivered as a list of norms, but through actions and social consequences that construct the characters' memory and experience.

These six patterns demonstrate that verbal–visual relations determine the layers of cultural knowledge that can be preserved. Reinforcement supports form documentation; complementation produces contextualization; sequential-procedural enables the transmission of procedures; symbolic explanation facilitates the maintenance of meaning; local terminology explanation supports linguistic preservation; while affective-narrative allows for the inheritance of values and social memory. These mechanisms are not mutually

exclusive, as a single book can activate several functions simultaneously. These findings illustrate that cultural preservation cannot be reduced to the mere storage of visual artifacts. A game can have its form documented, its materials and rules explained, its gameplay demonstrated, and its connection to collaborative values established all at once. Similarly, a ritual can simultaneously preserve objects, procession stages, terminology, philosophy, and social relations. Therefore, preservation occurs across material, procedural, linguistic, symbolic, and social layers.

This distinction is also crucial for understanding the "digital" status within the research corpus. Many of the analyzed books are PDFs or page-based books, meaning their digital nature primarily relates to the distribution and remediation of verbal–visual configurations, rather than audio, animation, or complex interactivity. Consequently, digitization cannot be treated as a synonym for multimodal innovation or pedagogical effectiveness. This caution aligns with the meta-analysis by Furenes, Kucirkova, and Bus (2021), which indicates that transitioning from print to screens does not automatically enhance children's comprehension. The benefits of digital media depend heavily on design quality and its alignment with content. In the context of this study, a book's preservative capacity is therefore more accurately assessed by the depth and interconnectedness of the cultural knowledge it represents, rather than its technological sophistication. A PDF-based book can still possess high preservative capacity if its forms, procedures, contexts, language, philosophy, and values are integrated cohesively; conversely, a more technically complex medium is not necessarily preservative if culture functions merely as decoration.

A Model for Integrating Digital Literacy Based on Local Wisdom

A synthesis of the seven domains of cultural representation, the three multimodal dimensions, the six intersemiotic patterns, and the six preservation mechanisms has resulted in a conceptual model of digital literacy integration based on local wisdom. This model positions preservation as an analytical framework that connects sources of local wisdom, multimodal encoding processes, intermodal relationships, preservation mechanisms, and their potential applications for cultural literacy.

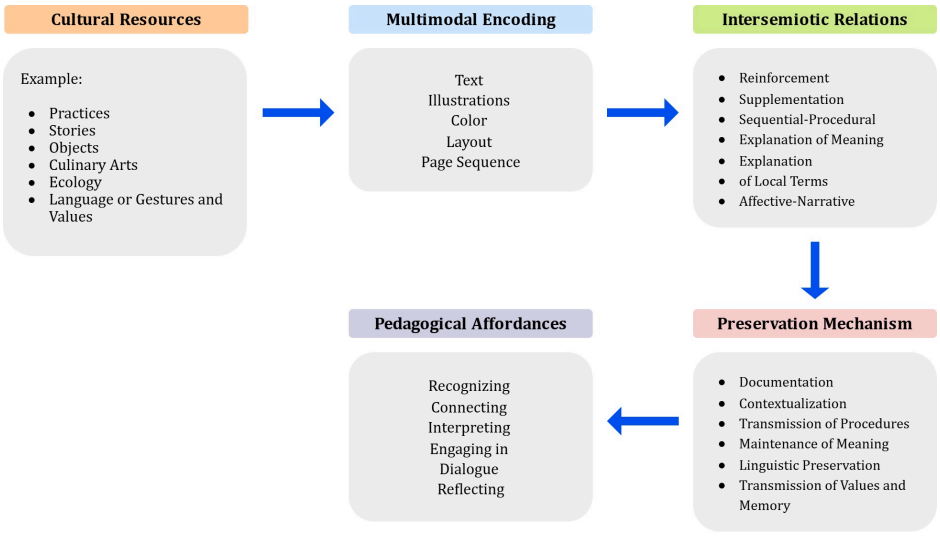


Figure 5. A Model for Cultural Preservation Findings Through Multimodal Analysis

At the foundational layer, sources of local wisdom encompass games, stories and collective memory, rituals, arts and artifacts, culinary traditions, ecological knowledge, language, gestures, and social values. When transposed into books, these sources undergo a process of multimodal encoding. Authors select the objects, terminology, actions, actors, and information to be narrated, while illustrators determine the visualized elements, perspectives, color palettes, composition, and visual salience. This process is not neutral, as every choice dictates which aspects of cultural knowledge are included or excluded from the representation. Consequently, digital books constitute a form of cultural mediation rather than a direct reproduction of cultural reality.

At the subsequent layer, verbal–visual relations determine the density of the preserved knowledge. If words and images merely provide identical information, the dominantly preserved layer is the outward appearance of the object or action. Conversely, when both modes complement each other by demonstrating sequential stages, preserving terminology, explaining philosophy, or connecting culture to characters' experiences, the representation achieves greater epistemic depth. This stance aligns with Serafini (2024), who posits words and images as integral parts of a multimodal ensemble rather than two independent components.

Intermodal relations subsequently generate six preservation mechanisms: form documentation, contextualization, procedural transmission, maintenance of symbolic meaning, linguistic preservation, and the inheritance of social values and memory. These mechanisms operate neither linearly nor mutually exclusively. A single cultural representation can simultaneously display physical form, explain procedures, preserve terminology, situate practices within social contexts, and link them to value systems.

This model, therefore, asserts that cultural preservation becomes more holistic when the six primary components form, practices, contexts, language, meaning, and values can be sustained within an interconnected multimodal configuration. Digitization merely provides a medium for distribution and representation; actual preservation lies in the quality of cultural knowledge successfully integrated into that medium.

The final layer of the model relates to pedagogical affordances. The multimodal configurations within the corpus offer five potential actions for cultural literacy: recognizing, connecting, interpreting, dialoguing, and reflecting. The use of the term affordance is crucial here, as this study did not involve readers as participants; thus, the model does not attempt to claim actual changes in children's knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors.

In the process of recognizing, readers can potentially identify artifacts, games, food, terminology, gestures, and cultural practices. Connecting extends this process by sitting on objects within their environments, regions, materials, actors, and social life. Interpreting encourages reading from outward form toward underlying meaning by observing the distribution of information between words and images. Dialoguing opens possibilities for comparing cultural practices and perspectives without establishing a single culture as a universal standard, whereas reflecting enables discussions concerning the sustainability, transformation, values, and relevance of cultural practices in contemporary life.

These five affordances align closely with the multiliteracies perspective, which acknowledges the plurality of communication modes alongside cultural and linguistic diversity (New London Group, 1996). Their orientation also intersects with culturally sustaining pedagogy, particularly in the notion that education should provide space for the sustainability of community languages, literacies, and cultural practices (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017).

By implication, reading cultural books can be directed not only toward questions about story content but also toward the intermodal division of labor: what information is conveyed through words, what appears exclusively in illustrations, and how both jointly construct cultural knowledge. Callow (2020) demonstrates that explicit discussions regarding verbal–visual relations can be a vital part of developing multimodal literacy. Through such an approach, cultural books function simultaneously as sources of knowledge about traditions and as materials for studying how meaning is constructed through semiotic resources.

Following the reading process, students can potentially be guided to dialogue about contexts and philosophies before producing responses in the form of conversations, writings, drawings, posters, retellings, or multimodal compositions. Such production is not

a decorative reproduction of cultural symbols, but rather an opportunity to select, connect, and reinterpret the knowledge acquired from reading.

This model also offers implications for digital book policies. The curation of books based on local wisdom should not stop at labels such as “folktales,” “culinary arts,” “traditional games,” or “regional culture.” Evaluation processes must consider the presence of cultural regions, actors, materials, practices, ecological knowledge, local terminology, processes, philosophies, and social values. Consequently, the quality of cultural representtation can be assessed based on the depth and interconnectedness of knowledge available to the reader, rather than the mere volume of local identity symbols appearing on the page.

Overall, the research findings demonstrate that children's digital books possess preservative capacity when local wisdom is constructed as a network of relationships among forms, actions, contexts, language, meaning, and values. Multimodality serves as an epistemic mechanism that determines which parts of cultural knowledge are merely made visible, which are contextualized, which have their procedures preserved, which have their philosophies explained, which are linguistically maintained, and which are linked to memory and social values. Within this framework, digital books are not merely storage vessels for cultural content; they are semiotic spaces where local knowledge is reconstructed to remain recognizable, interpretable, and potentially utilized within the literacy practices of primary education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the digital transformation of children's reading books does not automatically result in cultural preservation when it relies solely on the technical shift from print to screen-based formats. Based on a multimodal analysis of 22 digital enrichment books on Kemendikdasmen’s BUDI platform, local wisdom is authentically represented as a dynamic ecology of knowledge that interconnects material and intangible elements across seven cultural domains: traditional games, folktales and collective memory, traditions and social rituals, arts and artifacts, traditional cuisine, ecological knowledge, as well as language, gestures, and social values. Within this digital landscape, preservation occurs through the multimodal interplay among verbal language, visual illustrations, color, layout, and page sequencing. Together, these modes establish six distinct intersemiotic patterns reinforcement, complementation, sequential-procedural, explanation of symbolic meaning, explanation of local terminology, and affective-narrative which actively trigger six core preservation mechanisms; form documentation, socio-material contextualization, procedural transmis-

sion, maintenance of symbolic meaning, linguistic preservation, and the inheritance of social values and collective memory. Thus, the preservative capacity of children's digital books is determined more by the depth and interconnectedness of the cultural knowledge constructed through verbal–visual relations than by the technological sophistication of the digital format itself.

The synthesis of these findings culminates in a conceptual model for integrating local wisdom-based digital literacy, which systematically links cultural resources, multimodal encoding processes, intersemiotic relations, preservation mechanisms, and pedagogical affordances. This model concludes that cohesively integrated multimodal configurations generate five essential cultural literacy affordances for early readers; recognizing, connecting, interpreting, engaging in dialogue, and reflecting upon cultural knowledge. Conceptually, this framework establishes multimodality as an epistemic mechanism that determines which layers of cultural knowledge are merely made visible, contextualized, or procedurally transmitted, and which are linguistically, philosophically, and socially sustained. Ultimately, this research affirms that children's digital books function not merely as storage vessels for traditional content, but as vital semiotic spaces where local wisdom is holistically reconstructed to remain recognizable, interpretable, and meaningful within the literacy ecology of primary education.

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Ethical considerations

Not applicable

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors report that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool [Gemini] was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammar and spelling corrections, as well as to refine the flow of the article. The use of AI ensures the readability of this article without altering its substance and does not affect the scientific content, research design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of this manuscript. In addition, the author also used the web service draw.io (https://app.diagrams.net/), which might be suspected of being AI-based; in here, the author emphasizes that he used it manually and did not use any AI services that might be associated with that website. Although the authors acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence, full responsibility for the content of the manuscript remains with the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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