PROCEEDINGS
International Conference on Literature
Himpunan Sarjana-Kesusastraan Indonesia (HISKI)
E-ISSN 2988-4357

Universal ecological motifs in Topeng Malangan oral literature: A comparative literary perspective for creative writing instruction

Sri Wahyuni[1*], Frida Siswiyanti[2]
[1, 2]Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia
Email: [1]sriwy@unisma.ac.id, [2]fridasiswiyanti@unisma.ac.id

Abstract: *Oral literature represents a cultural heritage that preserves ecological knowledge, cultural values, and perspectives on human–nature relationships. This study explores universal ecological motifs embedded in Topeng Malangan oral literature and examines their relevance to comparative literary perspectives and creative writing instruction. Using a qualitative interpretive approach and ecocritical textual analysis, the study analyzes eight Topeng Malangan song lyrics through deductive–inductive thematic coding, integrating ecocritical and ecopedagogical perspectives. The findings reveal four major representations of nature: a cosmic-spiritual order, an aesthetic landscape and living space, a source of fertility and life sustainability, and a dynamic force reflecting human vulnerability. These representations embody ecological awareness, human–nature interconnectedness, ecological care, ecological responsibility, and place-based ecological knowledge. From a comparative literary perspective, these motifs reflect universal ecological concerns that transcend cultural boundaries while retaining their distinctive expression in local Indonesian oral traditions. The study highlights the potential of Topeng Malangan oral literature as a resource for creative writing instruction, connecting local cultural wisdom with universal literary themes, literary literacy, and sustainability education.*

Keywords: *oral literature, Topeng Malangan, ecopedagogy, ecological knowledge, creative writing*

INTRODUCTION

Oral literature represents a cultural heritage that records the identity, values, collective knowledge, and ecological experiences of a community. Transmitted through language, music, narratives, and performances, oral literature functions not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a repository of cultural perspectives on the environment. Representations of plants, animals, water, soil, the sky, seasons, and natural phenomena demonstrate that human relationships with the environment have long been embedded within cultural memory. Therefore, oral literature can be understood as a repository of ecological knowledge that reflects the interconnectedness of culture, humans, and nature (Hidajati et al., 2024).

The relationship between literature and the environment has been widely examined through the perspective of ecocriticism, an approach that explores how nature is represented and interpreted within cultural texts. This perspective views literary works as spaces for understanding human relationships with the more-than-human world and the construction of ecological values within society. Studies on traditional

How to cite (APA 7th): Wahyuni, S., & Siswiyanti, F. (2026). Universal ecological motifs in Topeng Malangan oral literature: A comparative literary perspective for creative writing instruction. *Proceedings 35th KIK, 35*, 699–716. https://doi.org/10.68634/kik.v35i.140

texts have demonstrated that local cultural works often contain ecological knowledge related to sustainability and ethical relationships between humans and nature. Assiddiq et al. (2025) showed that ecological metaphors in traditional manuscripts represent human–environment relationships through cultural symbols, while Ermawati and Wardani (2026) found that traditional Malay literature contains ecological values that can be examined through an ecocritical perspective.

These studies are closely connected to the concept of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which refers to environmental knowledge developed through community experiences and transmitted across generations through cultural practices. Companion (2025) explains that TEK encompasses not only practical knowledge of nature but also values, ethics, and belief systems that regulate human relationships with the environment. In the Southeast Asian context, Lim and Ansaldo (2026) emphasize that local ecological knowledge is closely associated with language, cultural identity, and people's living spaces. Thus, local traditions have significant potential as sources of ecological learning because they preserve knowledge shaped through communities' historical experiences.

This potential has become increasingly relevant in sustainability education through the approach of ecopedagogy. Ecopedagogy positions human–nature relationships as a central component of education by integrating ecological awareness, critical reflection, social experience, and local knowledge. Wang et al. (2026) explain that ecopedagogy expands sustainability education by encouraging learners to understand humans as part of ecological systems. This approach emphasizes that environmental education should consider cultural contexts because ecological values are often embedded within everyday community practices.

One local tradition that is relevant to this perspective is the Topeng Malangan performing art. As a cultural heritage of the Malang community, Topeng Malangan embodies not only aesthetic values but also philosophical, social, and educational meanings. Wahyuni et al. (2023) demonstrated that the local wisdom embedded in Topeng Malangan has relevance for character education because it contains moral and social values that can be internalized through learning processes. However, existing studies on Topeng Malangan have predominantly focused on cultural identity and character education, while the ecological dimensions embedded in the accompanying tembang lyrics remain largely unexplored.

As a form of oral literature, traditional song lyrics serve as a medium for transmitting cultural experiences through symbols, metaphors, and natural imagery. Traditional songs function not only as artistic expressions but also as repositories of ecological knowledge. Reyes-García and Fernández-Llamazares (2019) demonstrated that Indigenous traditional songs serve as media for transmitting ecological knowledge and collective environmental experiences. Similarly, Curran et al. (2025) explained that traditional songs can function as archives of biocultural relationships among humans, places, and environments.

Within educational contexts, research on music and ecoliteracy indicates that songs can foster emotional connections between humans and nature. Rantung et al. (2023) found that the use of song lyrics in learning activities can enhance students' ecoliteracy by providing social and cultural contexts closely connected to their

experiences. Sinaga (2020) demonstrated that environmentally themed song lyrics represent human–nature relationships through figurative language. Furthermore, Budiman et al. (2025) revealed that traditional music can function as a medium for environmental advocacy through the integration of local cultural values and ecological awareness, while Bañez (2025) highlighted that linguistic and rhetorical devices in songs contribute to raising awareness of social and environmental issues.

The use of local literature and music in education has also developed through culturally and environmentally based learning approaches. Cultural texts are no longer viewed merely as objects of appreciation but also as resources for developing creativity, critical thinking, and ecological sensitivity. Ambarwati et al. (2026) showed that literature-based environmental literacy enables students to understand local ecology through contextual approaches. Isnanda et al. (2025) found that integrating environmental awareness into text-based learning can improve writing abilities while strengthening ecological concern. In creative writing education, Al-Barakat et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of creativity-oriented activities, while Fatmawati (2025) highlighted the role of cultural contexts in literacy development.

Recent developments in arts education also indicate a shift toward approaches that integrate sustainability. Through the concept of eco-musicality, Matsunobu and Hebert (2025) explain that music can serve as a medium for developing sustainability awareness through artistic experiences. Han et al. (2025) found that environmental-themed music can enhance nature connectedness, while Miyauchi and Osawa (2026) demonstrated that cultural expressions in songs are associated with educational activities that foster students' connections with the environment.

Although research on culture, literature, music, and environmental education continues to expand, several research gaps remain. First, studies on Topeng Malangan have predominantly focused on cultural aspects and character education (Wahyuni et al., 2023), while representations of nature in its song lyrics have rarely been examined through an ecocritical perspective. Second, studies on music and ecology have largely focused on explicitly environmental songs or modern musical forms (Sinaga, 2020; Bañez, 2025), whereas the ecological potential of traditional performance-based songs remains underexplored. Third, research connecting ecological values in oral literature with pedagogical transformation for creative writing instruction remains limited.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that local wisdom can serve as a foundation for culturally and environmentally responsive learning. Wahyuni et al. (2025) showed that local cultural practices can be developed into culturally responsive literary learning. Wahyuni et al. (2026) further demonstrated that eco-cultural pedagogy based on local wisdom can strengthen student engagement and environmental responsibility. In addition, Balqis and Wahyuni (2026) found that local traditions can be developed into learning materials to strengthen cultural and ecological literacy.

Addressing these gaps, this study aims to analyze representations of nature in Topeng Malangan song lyrics, identify ecopedagogical values and principles reflected in human–nature relationships, and transform these values into stimuli and principles for creative writing instruction. This study contributes to the development of oral literature studies, ecocriticism, culturally based education, and sustainability education by demonstrating that local traditions are not merely cultural heritage but also valuable

sources of ecological and pedagogical knowledge relevant to twenty-first-century education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral Literature as Ecological Knowledge and Cultural Memory

Oral literature represents a form of cultural expression that preserves identity, values, collective experiences, and community knowledge. Through stories, songs, performances, and rituals, oral literature functions not only as an aesthetic product but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge regarding human relationships with the environment. From an ecological perspective, oral literature can be understood as a representation of ecological knowledge that develops through historical interactions between communities and nature.

The concept of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) demonstrates that local environmental knowledge is not limited to the utilization of natural resources but also encompasses ethical values, belief systems, and worldviews concerning sustainability. Companion (2025) explains that TEK is developed through community experiences in understanding and maintaining relationships with the environment. In the Southeast Asian context, Lim and Ansaldo (2026) emphasize that local ecological knowledge is closely connected to language, culture, and community identity.

Traditional songs represent one form of oral literature that plays an important role in transmitting ecological knowledge. Reyes-García and Fernández-Llamazares (2019) demonstrate that Tsimane' songs function as repositories of biodiversity knowledge and human relationships with living environments. Curran et al. (2025) further explain that Indigenous songlines serve as biocultural archives connecting humans, places, histories, and environmental changes.

In the Indonesian context, traditional performing arts serve a similar function as spaces for preserving cultural values. Topeng Malangan, as a cultural heritage of the Malang community, embodies not only aesthetic dimensions but also philosophical and social values. Wahyuni et al. (2023) demonstrate that the local wisdom embedded in Topeng Malangan has relevance for character education. However, the ecological dimensions contained in the tembang lyrics that accompany the performance remain insufficiently explored.

Ecocriticism and the Representation of Nature in Traditional Literature

Ecocriticism provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between cultural texts and the environment. This approach examines not only how nature is represented but also how texts construct understandings of the human position in relation to the more-than-human world.

From an ecocritical perspective, nature is not perceived as a passive background but as part of a relational system carrying social, cultural, and ethical meanings. Assiddiq et al. (2025) demonstrate that ecological metaphors in traditional manuscripts represent human–environment relationships through cultural symbols. Similarly, Ermawati and Wardani (2026) reveal that Riau Malay poetry contains ecological values expressed through respect for nature and human responsibility toward the environment.

Ecological representations in traditional literature are often constructed through figurative language. Fata et al. (2018) show that Acehnese traditional songs employ metaphors and symbols to convey cultural experiences, while Sinaga (2020) finds that Indonesian environmental song lyrics represent human–environment relationships through particular linguistic strategies. Therefore, an ecocritical approach is relevant for analyzing Topeng Malangan lyrics as representations of ecological knowledge within the communities that sustain this tradition.

Traditional Songs, Ecological Literacy, and Sustainability Education

Music and songs have significant potential as media for ecological education because they connect cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Unlike environmental education approaches that primarily emphasize information transfer, songs enable learners to engage with ecological issues through aesthetic experiences and meaning-making processes.

Rantung et al. (2023) demonstrate that the use of song lyrics in learning activities can enhance ecoliteracy by providing social and cultural contexts closely related to students' experiences. Budiman et al. (2025) also show that traditional music can function as a medium for environmental advocacy through the integration of local cultural identity and ecological awareness. Bañez (2025) explains that metaphors, repetition, and rhetorical strategies in songs can strengthen messages related to social and environmental issues.

In music education, the concept of eco-musicality proposed by Matsunobu and Hebert (2025) emphasizes that music can serve as a space for reflecting on sustainability. Han et al. (2025) demonstrate that environmental-themed music can enhance nature connectedness, while Miyauchi and Osawa (2026) show that cultural expressions in songs can support educational activities that foster students' connections with the environment.

Ecopedagogy, Local Wisdom, and Creative Writing Education

Ecopedagogy has developed as an educational approach that integrates ecological awareness, critical thinking, social experience, and cultural contexts. This approach emphasizes that environmental education should not merely provide knowledge about nature but should also develop an understanding that humans are interconnected with ecological systems.

Wang et al. (2026) explain that ecopedagogy expands sustainability education by positioning human–nature relationships as a central element of learning. Through the concept of eco-literate music pedagogy, Shevock (2017) demonstrates that arts education can contribute to ecological awareness, while Shevock and Bates (2024) emphasize the importance of sustainability-oriented music education.

In Indonesia, the integration of local culture into learning has received increasing attention. Wahyuni et al. (2025) demonstrate that local cultural practices can be developed into culturally responsive literary learning. Through the concept of eco-cultural pedagogy, Wahyuni et al. (2026) show that integrating local wisdom and ecological perspectives can enhance student engagement and environmental

responsibility. Balqis and Wahyuni (2026) further demonstrate that local traditions can be developed as instructional materials to strengthen cultural and ecological literacy.

In creative writing education, local cultural texts provide symbols, experiences, and perspectives that enrich the process of textual creation. Ambarwati et al. (2026) demonstrate that literature-based environmental literacy helps students understand local ecology through contextual approaches. Isnanda et al. (2025) find that integrating environmental issues into text-based learning improves writing skills while strengthening ecological awareness. Al-Barakat et al. (2025), Fatmawati (2025), and Kunz (2021) further highlight the importance of creative experiences, cultural contexts, and ecological reflection in developing writing abilities.

Research Gap and Research Position

Based on previous studies, three major research gaps can be identified. First, studies on Topeng Malangan have predominantly focused on cultural values and character education, while ecological representations within its tembang lyrics remain insufficiently examined. Second, research on music and ecology has largely focused on explicitly environmental songs, whereas traditional performance-based songs containing implicit ecological meanings have received limited attention. Third, studies exploring the transformation of oral literature into ecopedagogical principles for creative writing education remain limited.

Therefore, this study positions Topeng Malangan oral literature as a meeting point between ecocriticism, traditional ecological knowledge, ecopedagogy, and creative writing education. This study seeks to address these gaps by analyzing representations of nature in Topeng Malangan song lyrics, identifying the ecopedagogical values embedded within them, and formulating their transformation into culturally grounded principles for creative writing instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a **qualitative interpretive approach** using an **ecocritical textual analysis** design. This design was selected because the study focuses on interpreting representations of nature in *Topeng Malangan* song lyrics (*syair tembang*), identifying the ecopedagogical values embedded within them, and transforming these values into principles and stimuli for creative writing instruction. The study was not intended to measure the effectiveness of a particular instructional intervention; rather, it aimed to establish a conceptual relationship between ecological representations in oral literature, ecopedagogical principles, and creative writing pedagogy. The analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages: (1) ecocritical textual analysis to identify representations of nature and human–environment relationships in *Topeng Malangan* song lyrics; (2) ecopedagogical interpretation to reveal ecological educational values and principles embedded in these representations; and (3) pedagogical transformation to map ecological values into learning principles and creative writing stimuli.

Data Sources and Research Corpus. The research data consisted of words, phrases, lines, stanzas, metaphors, symbols, and other textual units within *Topeng Malangan* song lyrics that represent nature, ecological elements, and human–

environment relationships. The research corpus was derived from transcribed performance recordings consisting of eight *tembang* (traditional songs), namely *Ayak Dongo, Gadhingan, Bajul Ngantang, Lambang Siyak, Dhandhanggula, Kinanthi, Mijil,* and *Gagak Setro*. The corpus was selected purposively (*purposive corpus selection*) based on four criteria: (1) the lyrics are part of the *Topeng Malangan* performance tradition; (2) the sources and cultural contexts of the songs can be identified or verified; (3) the texts contain representations of nature, landscapes, living organisms, natural phenomena, or human–environment relationships; and (4) the texts provide sufficient contextual information for interpretive analysis. The verbal data were transcribed verbatim while maintaining relevant characteristics of the original language for analytical purposes. Local terms, cultural expressions, and symbols without direct equivalents were retained in their original forms and explained within their cultural contexts. This procedure was undertaken to preserve the ecological and cultural meanings embedded throughout the analytical process.

Data Analysis. Data analysis integrated **ecocritical and ecopedagogical perspectives** through a **deductive–inductive thematic coding** strategy. The ecocritical perspective was employed to examine how nature is constructed, represented, and positioned within the texts. The analysis did not focus solely on explicit references to natural elements but also examined the symbolic, metaphorical, ethical, and cultural functions of these representations.

The analytical process consisted of three main phases. **Phase One: Ecological Representation Analysis.** The researcher conducted repeated readings of the entire corpus to develop an understanding of the textual and cultural contexts of the songs. Textual units related to nature, flora, fauna, landscapes, natural phenomena, ecological spaces, resources, and human–environment interactions were assigned initial codes. These codes were then compared and grouped according to patterns of ecological representation. The interpretation focused on understanding how nature was positioned within the texts, including as a space of life, a source of livelihood, an agentive entity, a spiritual-cultural space, or part of reciprocal relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. **Phase Two: Ecopedagogical Interpretation.** The ecological themes identified in the first phase were subsequently mapped through an ecopedagogical perspective. The analysis focused on values including ecological awareness, human–nature interconnectedness, ecological care, ecological responsibility, sustainability, *place-based ecological knowledge*, and critical awareness of environmental issues. These categories were used as sensitizing concepts rather than fixed analytical categories. Therefore, the emergence of additional categories remained possible based on the characteristics of the research data. **Phase Three: Pedagogical Transformation.** The identified ecopedagogical values and principles were transformed into the context of creative writing instruction. This transformation involved mapping the relationships among textual units, forms of nature representation, ecological meanings, ecopedagogical values, creative writing learning principles, and forms of writing stimuli.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations. The trustworthiness of the study was maintained through four criteria: **credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability**. Credibility was strengthened through repeated readings of the corpus,

comparisons among textual units, and peer debriefing regarding the analytical categories and interpretations generated. Interpretations of culturally specific terms, symbols, and expressions were also consulted with *Topeng Malangan* cultural practitioners to avoid interpretations detached from their cultural contexts. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation of the entire analytical process, including corpus selection, initial coding, category development, ecocritical interpretation, ecopedagogical mapping, and pedagogical transformation. All changes in codes and categories throughout the analytical process were recorded as part of the *audit trail*. Transferability was supported through sufficient descriptions of the characteristics of the corpus, the cultural context of *Topeng Malangan*, and textual examples representing each category. Through this approach, readers can evaluate the relevance of the findings for other contexts of oral literature and creative writing education.

This study also adhered to ethical principles in the use and representation of oral literature as cultural knowledge. Sources of lyrics and performance documentation were transparently acknowledged according to ownership status and data accessibility. Data collection involving cultural practitioners was conducted with participants' consent, and textual interpretations maintained the cultural context and local meanings embedded within the *Topeng Malangan* tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Representations of Nature in Topeng Malangan Song Lyrics

The analysis of the eight *Topeng Malangan* songs demonstrates that nature is represented through various ecological elements, including the cosmos, landscapes, flora, fauna, natural phenomena, resources, and human–environment relationships. These representations do not merely function as environmental descriptions but also operate as cultural symbols that construct meanings regarding life and human relationships with nature.

The findings reveal (Tabel 1) four major patterns of nature representation in *Topeng Malangan* lyrics: (1) nature as a cosmic-spiritual order; (2) nature as an aesthetic landscape and living space; (3) nature as a source of fertility and life sustainability; and (4) nature as a dynamic force reflecting human limitations.

Table 1. Patterns of Nature Representation in *Topeng Malangan* Song Lyrics

No.	Pattern of Nature Representation	Data Findings	Song Source
1	Nature as a cosmic-spiritual order	The earth, sky, day, night, and the universe are understood as parts of an interconnected order of life	*Gadhingan*
2	Nature as an aesthetic landscape and living space	Birds, flowers, gardens, sunlight, and rural environments represent harmony in life	*Lambang Siyak*
3	Nature as a source of fertility and life sustainability	Rice, Dewi Sri, agricultural products, and farming elements represent sources of community livelihood	*Lambang Siyak*
4	Nature as a dynamic force	Rain, floods, water currents, and environmental changes demonstrate natural forces that cannot be fully controlled by humans	*Kinanthi*

In the *Gadhingan* song, nature is represented as part of a cosmic system connecting the earth and the universe. This representation is reflected in the following lyric:

"*Kabeh sak isine bumi ugo isine akoso*"

(The entirety of the earth is also part of the universe.)

This expression indicates that the earth and all elements within it are perceived as an interconnected unity. The representation of nature as an aesthetic space appears in *Lambang Siyak*. Flora and fauna are presented through images of gardens, flowers, and birdsong:

"*Ana sawung muni kukilo, puspo mekrok ing taman sari*"

(There are roosters and birds singing, while flowers bloom in the garden.)

This data indicates that nature is positioned as a living space that embodies beauty and balance. Beyond its aesthetic dimension, *Lambang Siyak* also represents the relationship between nature and human sustainability through fertility symbols:

"*Dewi Sri lan Sadono, ngreksa bumi supaya rahayu*"

(Dewi Sri and Sadono protect the earth to maintain prosperity.)

This representation illustrates the relationship between nature, agriculture, and community well-being. Meanwhile, the *Kinanthi* song represents nature as a dynamic force through the phenomena of rain and floods:

"*Udan deres nggawa banjir, banyu mili nggawa lara*"

(Heavy rain brings floods, flowing water brings suffering.)

This representation demonstrates that nature is not only a source of life but also possesses dynamics that can influence human existence.

Ecopedagogical Values in Nature Representations

Based on the interpretation of ecological representations (as shown in tabel 2), five major values relevant to ecopedagogical principles were identified: (1) ecological awareness; (2) human–nature interconnectedness; (3) ecological care; (4) ecological responsibility; and (5) place-based ecological knowledge.

Table 2. Ecopedagogical Values in *Topeng Malangan* Lyrics

No.	Ecopedagogical Value	Textual Indicators	Data Examples
1	Ecological awareness	Awareness of natural elements as integral parts of life	"*Kabeh sak isine bumi ugo isine akoso*"
2	Human–nature interconnectedness	Reciprocal relationships between humans and the environment	Representations of the earth, universe, and living beings
3	Ecological care	Appreciation of the beauty and existence of living beings	"*Puspo mekrok ing taman sari*"
4	Ecological responsibility	Awareness of maintaining the balance of life	"*Ngreksa bumi supaya rahayu*"
5	Place-based ecological knowledge	Knowledge of local living spaces and community activities	Rice fields, gardens, rain, rivers

The analysis indicates that ecological values in the lyrics do not appear through direct environmental messages but through cultural symbols, metaphors, and representations of community life. Therefore, ecological meanings in *Topeng Malangan* are implicit and embedded within broader cultural systems of meaning.

Transformation of Ecopedagogical Values into Creative Writing Instruction

The findings demonstrate that ecological values embedded in *Topeng Malangan* lyrics can be transformed into principles for culturally grounded creative writing instruction. This transformation was conducted by mapping relationships among textual representations, ecological meanings, ecopedagogical values, and forms of writing activities.

Table 3. Transformation of Ecopedagogical Values into Creative Writing Learning Principles

Textual Representation	Ecopedagogical Value	Learning Principle	Writing Stimulus
Nature as a cosmic unity	Human–nature interconnectedness	Developing ecological perspectives	Writing from the perspective of nature
Flora and fauna as living spaces	Ecological care	Developing empathy toward living beings	Writing stories about relationships between humans, animals, and plants
Fertility and agriculture	Place-based ecological knowledge	Using local environments as sources of ideas	Writing ecological experiences from surrounding environments
Floods and environmental changes	Ecological responsibility	Developing critical environmental reflection	Writing narratives about ecological changes

Thus, the findings demonstrate that *Topeng Malangan* lyrics serve not only cultural and aesthetic functions but also provide conceptual resources for developing creative writing instruction oriented toward ecological awareness.

Discussion

Nature as a Cosmic, Cultural, and Ecological System in Topeng Malangan Song Lyrics

The findings demonstrate that nature in *Topeng Malangan* song lyrics functions not merely as an aesthetic element but as a life system encompassing cosmic, spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. The four patterns of representation identified—nature as a cosmic-spiritual order, an aesthetic landscape and living space, a source of fertility, and a dynamic force reflecting human vulnerability—indicate that the *Topeng Malangan* tradition constructs an integrative ecological worldview. Pasted markdown
These findings extend the understanding of oral literature as a repository of *traditional ecological knowledge* (TEK). Traditional ecological knowledge does not merely concern the utilization of natural resources but also encompasses values, beliefs, and ways in which communities understand relationships between humans and the environment (Companion, 2025). Therefore, ecological knowledge can be preserved through cultural symbols, narratives, rituals, and artistic expressions.

The cosmic-spiritual representation found in the *Gadhingan* song illustrates the worldview that the earth and all its elements constitute an interconnected unity of life. The line *"Kabeh sak isine bumi ugo isine akoso"* demonstrates that nature is not separated from human existence but is understood as part of a broader cosmic order. This finding corresponds with Lim and Ansaldo (2026), who explain that ecological knowledge among Southeast Asian communities is closely connected with language, culture, and local belief systems.

From an ecocritical perspective, this finding indicates a movement away from anthropocentric views toward a more relational understanding of human–nature relationships. Nature is not merely a background for human activities but occupies a meaningful position within the larger system of life. Assiddiq et al. (2025) similarly demonstrate that natural symbols in traditional texts function to represent relationships between humans and the more-than-human world.

This study also extends Wahyuni et al.'s (2023) research on *Topeng Malangan*. While previous research emphasized the philosophical values and character education dimensions of the tradition, the present study demonstrates that *Topeng Malangan* also contains ecological dimensions that represent relationships between humans and the environment.

The representation of nature as an aesthetic landscape in *Lambang Siyak* further indicates that human relationships with the environment are not solely functional but also emotional and aesthetic. The presence of *sawung*, *kukilo*, *puspo*, sunlight, and gardens illustrates that nature is experienced through sensory and spiritual dimensions. This finding is consistent with Reyes-García and Fernández-Llamazares (2019), who argue that traditional songs function not only as repositories of ecological information but also as media that cultivate emotional connections between humans and the environment.

Multidimensional Nature Representation and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

This study demonstrates that nature in *Topeng Malangan* lyrics appears through multiple dimensions, including spiritual, aesthetic, agrarian, and dynamic dimensions. These representations indicate that ecological understanding within local cultures cannot be reduced merely to the presence of natural elements but encompasses broader systems of meaning.

In *Lambang Siyak*, nature is positioned as a living space with intrinsic value. Flora, fauna, and landscapes function not only as symbols of beauty but also as integral components of community experiences. This perspective aligns with the concept of *ecological care*, which emphasizes appreciation and ethical consideration toward the more-than-human world. Matsunobu and Hebert (2025) explain that artistic experiences through music can serve as a medium for developing sustainability awareness.

The findings of Han et al. (2025) regarding the relationship between music and *nature connectedness* further support this study. Emotional connections with nature represent an important dimension in developing ecological concern because individuals tend to demonstrate greater environmental care when they possess psychological connections with the natural world.

However, *Topeng Malangan* lyrics do not represent nature solely as a harmonious space. In *Kinanthi*, nature is also portrayed as a dynamic force through representations of rain, floods, and environmental changes. This representation demonstrates that humans have limitations in controlling natural processes. This perspective corresponds with Ermawati and Wardani (2026), who show that traditional texts represent nature as part of a life system characterized by reciprocal relationships with humans.

Thus, *Topeng Malangan* lyrics reveal a complex ecological paradigm: nature is valued for its beauty, utilized as a source of livelihood, and simultaneously recognized as an entity possessing its own power and dynamics.

Topeng Malangan Lyrics as a Manifestation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The findings indicate that *Topeng Malangan* lyrics can be understood as a form of TEK transmitted through cultural expression. This ecological knowledge is not communicated through modern scientific concepts but through cultural symbols, agrarian experiences, and communities' spiritual relationships with nature.

The representation of Dewi Sri and Sadono in *Lambang Siyak* illustrates the relationship between nature, agriculture, food systems, and community sustainability. Nature is understood as a source of life that must be respected. This finding corresponds with Companion (2025), who explains that TEK always contains both practical dimensions and ethical values regulating human relationships with the environment.

Reyes-García and Fernández-Llamazares (2019) demonstrate that traditional songs effectively preserve ecological knowledge because environmental information is transmitted through memorable cultural forms. A similar process occurs in *Topeng Malangan*, where *tembang* functions as a medium for preserving ecological values through artistic performance practices.

Curran et al. (2025) further emphasize that traditional songs can function as archives of biocultural relationships between humans and environments. In this study,

Topeng Malangan lyrics do not merely describe nature but preserve Javanese communities' ways of understanding the earth, fertility, seasons, and relationships between humans and transcendent forces.

Ecopedagogical Values in Nature Representation

The representation of nature in *Topeng Malangan* lyrics demonstrates strong relevance to ecopedagogical principles. The five identified values—ecological awareness, human–nature interconnectedness, ecological care, ecological responsibility, and place-based ecological knowledge—indicate that oral literature can function as a source of sustainability education.

Representations of flora, fauna, and landscapes cultivate ecological awareness by encouraging learners to recognize diverse forms of life within their environments. Wang et al. (2026) explain that ecopedagogy aims to develop an understanding that humans are components of ecological systems rather than separate entities from nature.

Furthermore, the aesthetic appreciation of nature in *Lambang Siyak* contributes to ecological care through artistic experience. Shevock (2017) demonstrates that arts education can provide a space for developing ecological literacy because aesthetic experiences strengthen human relationships with the environment. Pasted markdown
The representation of floods and environmental changes in *Kinanthi* also provides insight into ecological responsibility. The recognition of nature as a powerful force highlights the importance of developing more responsible relationships between humans and the environment. This finding aligns with Wahyuni et al.'s (2026) concept of *eco-cultural pedagogy*, which argues that integrating local culture and ecological perspectives can strengthen learners' environmental responsibility.

Transformation of Ecopedagogical Values into Creative Writing Instruction

An important contribution of this study is demonstrating that ecological values embedded in oral literature can be transformed into principles for creative writing instruction. This transformation does not position traditional lyrics merely as materials to be memorized but as sources of inspiration for textual creation. Pasted markdown
In creative writing education, nature is often treated merely as a theme. This study demonstrates that nature can function as a perspective for creative thinking. Representations of nature in *Topeng Malangan* can be developed into learning stimuli that cultivate ecological sensitivity, empathy toward the more-than-human world, and critical reflection on environmental changes.

This approach is consistent with Al-Barakat et al. (2025), who demonstrate that creativity-based activities grounded in experience can improve writing abilities. Ambarwati et al. (2026) also show that literature-based environmental literacy helps students understand local ecology through contextual approaches. Meanwhile, Isnanda et al. (2025) find that integrating environmental issues into text-based learning improves literacy skills while strengthening ecological awareness. Pasted markdown
Therefore, creative writing education can become a space that connects literature, local culture, and sustainability education.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions

Theoretically, this study expands Indonesian ecocritical scholarship by demonstrating that traditional oral literature contains complex ecological representations. It extends studies of *Topeng Malangan* beyond cultural identity and character education toward a perspective centered on human–nature relationships.

Conceptually, this study brings together three fields of inquiry: oral literature, cultural ecology, and creative writing pedagogy through an ecopedagogical framework rooted in local culture.

Pedagogically, this study demonstrates that local oral literature can serve as a contextual learning resource. This finding aligns with Wahyuni et al. (2025), who argue that local culture can be developed into literary learning responsive to students' contexts. However, this study extends that perspective by showing that ecological dimensions within local culture can also become sources of creativity and sustainability education.

Overall, this study demonstrates that *Topeng Malangan* lyrics represent nature as a multidimensional life system. Nature is understood as part of a cosmic order, an aesthetic space, a source of livelihood, and a dynamic force shaping human experiences. Therefore, traditional oral literature should be recognized not only as cultural heritage but also as a valuable source of ecological and pedagogical knowledge for twenty-first-century education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that oral literature within the Topeng Malangan tradition functions not only as an aesthetic element of cultural performance but also as a repository of community ecological knowledge. The Topeng Malangan song lyrics represent human–nature relationships through cosmic-spiritual, aesthetic, agrarian, and reflective dimensions. These findings indicate that nature is not positioned as a passive object but rather as an integral component of a life system that shapes community values, experiences, and cultural identity.

The primary contribution of this study lies in expanding the understanding of Javanese local wisdom as a source of traditional ecological knowledge and ecopedagogy. Through an ecocritical perspective, this study demonstrates that ecological knowledge can be embodied in cultural symbols, metaphors, and narratives rather than existing solely in formal scientific concepts. The representations of nature in Topeng Malangan reveal a relational ecological worldview that positions humans as interconnected participants within broader networks of life and environmental systems.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study demonstrates that local oral literature has significant potential to be developed as a resource for ecopedagogy-based creative writing instruction. The ecological values embedded in Topeng Malangan lyrics can be transformed into learning stimuli that encourage ecological awareness, empathy toward the more-than-human world, critical reflection on environmental issues, and appreciation of local cultural knowledge. Thus, language and literature education can serve as a space for integrating literacy, creativity, cultural identity, and sustainability education.

This study also provides implications for local cultural preservation. The preservation of Topeng Malangan should not be understood merely as maintaining the form of cultural performance but also as revitalizing the knowledge systems embedded within the tradition so that they remain relevant to contemporary educational needs and environmental challenges.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to textual analysis and the conceptual transformation of ecopedagogical values within Topeng Malangan lyrics. Future research may examine the implementation of these principles in actual learning practices, develop culture–ecology-based instructional materials, or conduct comparative studies with other oral traditions in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study emphasizes that traditional oral literature should not be viewed merely as a cultural legacy of the past but as a source of ecological and pedagogical knowledge with significant relevance for developing sustainability education rooted in local identities.

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