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FROM SPEECH TO ACTION: THE ROLE OF SAMIN LANGUAGE IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

This study examines how the Samin (Sedulur Sikep) language functions as a medium for environmental education among primary school children in Margomulyo, Bojonegoro, Indonesia. Using a qualitative ethnographic design, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, oral narratives, cultural sayings, songs, genealogical records, and visual documentation. The study analysed the data using Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, focusing on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, alongside thematic and contextual analysis. The findings show that the Samin language encodes ecological knowledge through expressions concerning the earth, livelihood, restraint, responsibility, and human dependence on nature. Pitutur, songs, stories, parental advice, cultural activities, and adult modelling transmit environmental values. Ideational meanings represent ecological relationships, interpersonal meanings regulate value transmission and social interaction, and textual meanings organise teachings into memorable and coherent forms. The study also identifies honesty, patience, persistence, sincerity, moderation, non-arbitrary conduct, knowledge seeking, and gratitude toward the earth as central values associated with environmental behaviour. Based on these findings, the study proposes a "From Speech to Action" model describing the progression from culturally encoded discourse to value understanding, social reinforcement, habituation, and environmental practice. The study contributes to culturally responsive environmental education by demonstrating the pedagogical potential of Indigenous language and local knowledge.

Keywords: Samin community; local language; environmental education; primary education; systemic functional linguistics; local wisdom; ethnography.

1. Introduction

Environmental education has become a global priority because developing pro-environmental behaviour during childhood is essential for achieving sustainable development. However, environmental education in primary schools often emphasises scientific concepts and cognitive knowledge while paying less attention to the cultural and linguistic contexts through which children construct their understanding of nature. Recent studies argue that local and Indigenous languages are not merely communication systems but repositories of ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, cultural identity, and practical survival strategies. Local

languages encode relationships between humans and nature through myths, rituals, oral traditions, and everyday expressions that facilitate the intergenerational transmission of ecological knowledge (Rero, Hasanuddin, Malihah, Sapriya, & Ratmaningsih, 2025). Likewise, ethnobotanical studies demonstrate that traditional plant-based crafts preserve ecological knowledge while simultaneously maintaining linguistic identity and cultural continuity (Sajjad et al., 2024). Cognitive and linguistic research further suggests that culturally embedded vocabularies and semantic associations shape children's conceptualisation of the natural world, thereby influencing environmental identity and behaviour (Lewis, Cahill, Madnani, & Evans, 2023; Malt & Majid, 2023).

Attention has therefore grown toward integrating Indigenous knowledge into Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Place-based educational initiatives, including ethno-ecological camps and Indigenous cultural immersion programs, have been shown to strengthen children's environmental awareness while simultaneously revitalising local languages and cultural practices. (Lewis et al., 2023; Sleptsov, Неустроева, Fedorova, & Kozhurova, 2024; Неустроева, Shergina, Kozhurova, Permyakova, & Alexeev, 2023). Similarly, Indigenous curriculum initiatives emphasise integrating language, identity, local ecological knowledge, and community participation into sustainability education, rather than relying solely on standardised scientific content. (Malt & Majid, 2023). Research also indicates that disruptions in language socialisation may weaken children's cultural competence, while stronger enculturation is associated with healthier developmental outcomes and more adaptive environmental behaviours. (Safa, White, & Knight, 2021; Sparks et al., 2024; Vizina, 2022). These findings suggest that local languages function not only as cultural heritage but also as educational resources capable of fostering long-term environmental responsibility.

In educational linguistics, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a suitable theoretical framework for examining how language supports environmental learning. The ideational metafunction explains how language represents ecological knowledge and human–environment relationships, the interpersonal metafunction illustrates how values and identities are negotiated through communication, and the textual metafunction demonstrates how discourse organises knowledge into coherent narratives that facilitate learning. Previous studies have successfully applied Hallidayan discourse analysis to environmental education, including analyses of integrated environmental instruction, school linguistic landscapes, environmental textbooks, and cultural films promoting sustainability. (Abramova, Shishmolina, & Yessengaliyeva, 2023; Huang, 2023; Maulidina & Prastio, 2024; Sumarlam, Purnanto, & Ardhian, 2021; Turko, Usacheva, & Atamanova, 2023). Collectively, these studies indicate that language not only conveys environmental information but also mediates environmental values, identities, and behavioural orientations.

Scholars have also increasingly examined the integration of local wisdom into environmental education. Anthropolinguistic studies demonstrate that myths, rituals, and oral traditions preserve agro-ecological knowledge and environmental norms through local languages. (Rero et al., 2025). Ethnobotanical research recommends incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge into formal curricula because traditional practices provide authentic contexts for sustainability learning. (Sajjad et al., 2024). Educational innovations such as ethno-ecological camps, place-based learning, culturally responsive STEAM education, and multimodal Indigenous curricula further illustrate that collaboration among families, schools, and communities creates meaningful opportunities for children to internalise environmental values through authentic experiences. (Lewis et al., 2023)(O'Brien, Dolling, Hedblom, & Pálsdóttir, 2025)(Safa et al., 2021; Sleptsov et al.,

2024)(Uppin & Timoštšuk, 2024). Moreover, school discourse, including signage, textbooks, and picturebooks, reinforces environmental character education by embedding sustainability values within children's everyday learning environments. (Subramaniam, Aindri, Grigoriadou, & Rijke, 2025)(Sumarlam et al., 2021).

Despite these advances, important research gaps remain. Existing studies primarily examine Indigenous language revitalisation, environmental education, cultural identity, or curriculum development separately. Few studies examine how local language simultaneously transmits ecological knowledge, shapes environmental identity, and fosters pro-environmental behaviour among primary school children. More specifically, no empirical study has systematically explored how Indonesian primary schools can integrate the language and cultural knowledge of the Samin (Sedulur Sikep) community into environmental education. Current literature highlights the need for Indigenous curriculum development, teacher professional development, localised instructional materials, and evaluations of behavioural outcomes, yet empirical evidence from the Samin context remains absent (Abramova et al., 2023)(Maulidina & Prastio, 2024)(Prabawani, Hadi, Zen, Hapsari, & Ainuddin, 2022)(Rero et al., 2025)(Sajjad et al., 2024)(Timmis et al., 2024)(Vizina, 2022).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the role of the Samin language in environmental education for primary school children through an ethnographic approach grounded in Halliday's metafunction theory. The study assumes that local language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a cultural mechanism that transforms ecological knowledge into environmental values and everyday practices. Specifically, it analyses how the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of Samin language contribute to children's environmental learning and character formation. This research's novelty lies in integrating Indigenous language, systemic functional linguistics, environmental education, and local wisdom into a single analytical framework. By proposing the conceptual model of **"From Speech to Action,"** this study contributes to the development of culturally responsive environmental education. It provides empirical evidence supporting the integration of Indigenous languages into Education for Sustainable Development in primary education.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic design to investigate how the Samin (Sedulur Sikep) language functions as a medium for environmental education among primary school children. Ethnography was selected because it enables researchers to examine language within its natural sociocultural context through prolonged engagement with community members, everyday interactions, and cultural practices. Rather than treating language as an isolated linguistic system, the study explored how oral traditions, local narratives, family interactions, and community activities mediate ecological knowledge, cultural identity, and environmental values. This approach is consistent with contemporary ethnographic studies that integrate participant observation, in-depth interviews, and cultural artefact analysis to understand the relationship between language, Indigenous knowledge, and education. (Hecht, 2023)(Ni, Dong, & Kaniadakis, 2025)(Rero et al., 2025).

2.2, Participants and Data Sources

The research was conducted in the Samin community of Margomulyo Village, Bojonegoro Regency, Indonesia. Researchers purposively selected participants based on their knowledge of

Samin traditions, language, environmental practices, and children's education. The primary participants included community elders, parents, teachers, and cultural practitioners who transmit local knowledge across generations. The study collected data from multiple sources to capture linguistic practices in authentic contexts, including semi-structured interviews, participant observations, cultural narratives, oral traditions, community activities, photographs, genealogical records, and other relevant community documents. Combining multiple data sources enabled the study to examine language as both discourse and social practice.

2.3, Instruments and Materials

The researcher served as the primary research instrument throughout the study. Supporting instruments included semi-structured interview guides, observation protocols, field notes, digital audio recordings, and documentation forms for photographs and cultural artefacts. The analytical corpus consisted of interview transcripts, oral narratives, traditional sayings (*pitutur*), songs, visual documentation, and historical materials. These materials provided multimodal evidence for examining how environmental knowledge and values are embedded in everyday language use.

2.4, Procedure

Data collection used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation focused on family interactions, community gatherings, educational settings, and environmental practices to understand language use in natural contexts. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' perspectives on language, environmental values, children's education, and cultural transmission. The study collected documentary materials, including oral narratives, traditional stories, genealogical documents, and visual records, to complement observational and interview data. The researchers transcribed all interviews verbatim before analysis, and systematically organised field notes and documentary materials to facilitate cross-source comparison.

2.5, Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly Halliday's three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The analysis followed four stages. First, we compiled all interview transcripts, oral traditions, and documentary materials into a unified qualitative corpus. Second, lexical-grammatical coding identified environmental concepts, evaluative expressions, interactional patterns, and textual organisation within the discourse. Third, thematic coding identified recurring patterns related to environmental knowledge, character values, and educational practices. Finally, contextual interpretation integrated linguistic findings with ethnographic observations to explain how language mediated ecological learning within family, community, and school settings. This analytical strategy follows recent qualitative applications of SFL that combine discourse analysis with thematic interpretation to examine environmental and educational communication (Lewis et al., 2023)(Rero et al., 2025)(Sajjad et al., 2024)(Sleptsov et al., 2024).

2.6, Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Trustworthiness was strengthened through methodological and source triangulation by comparing findings across interviews, observations, cultural documents, and visual materials. The analysis refined coding categories iteratively to ensure consistency and conceptual clarity, following established qualitative coding procedures. (Bubpa et al., 2025; Franck et al., 2022)(Kikhia, Gharib, Sauter, Vincens, & Loss, 2021). We continuously reviewed interpretations against field evidence to maintain contextual validity. The study observed ethical principles by obtaining informed consent from participants before interviews and observations, ensuring voluntary participation,

respecting local cultural protocols, and maintaining confidentiality for all research participants throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The study produced a qualitative corpus consisting of interview transcripts, oral narratives, cultural sayings, songs, genealogical records, and visual documentation collected in the Samin (Sedulur Sikep) community of Margomulyo, Bojonegoro. The dataset was organised into seven source categories: four interview transcripts, one transcript of Samin historical narratives, one genealogical document, and one set of field photographs. The four interview transcripts primarily recorded statements from Bambang Sutrisno, a descendant of Hardjo Kardi, concerning Samin teachings, family education, cultural activities, environmental values, and intergenerational transmission. Field observations covered the village entrance, the Samin monument, a forest conservation area, the pitutur luhur monument, residential spaces, traditional houses, a primary school, the cultural hall, and a craftsperson's house.

Table 1. Overview of the Qualitative Data Sources Used in the Study

Data source	Number	Main content
Interview transcripts	4	Language use, cultural values, family education, environmental practices, community activities
Samin narrative transcript	1	Historical figures, moral teachings, intergenerational transmission
Genealogical documentation	1	Lineage of Samin Surosentiko and later cultural custodians
Field documentation category	1	Cultural spaces, forest area, houses, school, monuments, and community facilities
Total source categories	7	Linguistic, historical, social, educational, and environmental data

Table 1 shows that the evidence was distributed across spoken, written, historical, and visual materials. Interview data made up the largest share of the verbal corpus. At the same time, narratives, genealogies, and photographs provided contextual information about the cultural and spatial settings in which the language was used.

The linguistic data showed that ecological knowledge was communicated through several recurring forms: pitutur or moral sayings, songs, historical narratives, family advice, and community conversations. These forms generally did not use technical terms such as ecology, conservation, or sustainability. Instead, people expressed environmental meanings through statements about the earth, work, restraint, responsibility, and appropriate conduct. One song described the earth as the source of food, drink, and the ground on which people stand. This formulation positioned the earth as a direct condition of human life. Another recurrent expression, "observe, learn, and then make a serious effort," organised learning into a sequence of attention, understanding, and action.

The analysis identified three groups of linguistic functions corresponding to Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Ideational meanings appeared in statements about the earth, work, history, livelihood, and the relationship between humans and their surroundings. Interpersonal meanings appeared in advice, reminders, examples provided by adults, and the concept of ngangsu kawruh, which referred to seeking or exchanging knowledge. Textual meanings appeared in the organisation of teachings into songs, stories, genealogies, and ordered sequences of values.

Table 2. Metafunctional patterns identified in Samin discourse

Metafunction	**Data form**	**Recorded meaning**	**Educational relevance**
Ideational	Song about the earth	The earth provides food, water, and a place to live	Represents nature as part of everyday life
Ideational	"Observe, learn, and make an effort"	Learning proceeds from observation to action	Connects knowledge with practical activity
Interpersonal	Parental advice and example	Values are conveyed through reminders rather than force	Establishes a dialogic educational relationship
Interpersonal	*Ngangsu kawruh*	Knowledge is exchanged through listening and inquiry	Encourages participatory learning
Textual	Stories of Samin Surosentiko and later figures	Values are organised through historical narrative	Supports intergenerational transmission
Textual	Ordered values: honesty, patience, effort, acceptance, sincerity	Moral conduct is presented as a sequence	Provides a structured pattern of behaviour

Table 2 indicates that the three metafunctions appeared in different but connected forms. Ideational language represented environmental and social experience, interpersonal language regulated relationships between adults and children, and textual language organised teachings into memorable forms. The metafunctional summary identified six principal units: two ideational, two interpersonal, and two textual.

The corpus also reflected a consistent set of cultural values tied to social and environmental conduct. Eight recurring categories emerged: honesty, patience, trokal (persistent effort), acceptance, sincerity, non-arbitrariness, ngangsu kawruh, and gratitude toward the earth. Honesty involved speaking truthfully, returning found property, and not taking others' rights. Patience referred to restraint and the avoidance of impulsive action. Trokal referred to sustained effort, learning, working, and creating useful activities. Acceptance meant recognising the results of one's effort without excessive demands, while sincerity emphasised helping others without expecting compensation.

Non-arbitrariness was expressed as a prohibition against acting carelessly toward people or nature. Gratitude toward the earth appeared in songs and statements acknowledging land, water, forests, and living spaces as sources of life. Gotong royong, although not listed as a separate metafunctional category, was repeatedly documented in community activities, including mutual assistance, agricultural support, school establishment, festivals, and annual earth-related ceremonies.

Table 3. Cultural values and observed forms of action

Cultural value	**Behavioral meaning**	**Form recorded in the data**
Honesty	Respecting truth and the rights of others	Returning property and speaking truthfully

Cultural value	Behavioral meaning	Form recorded in the data
Patience	Controlling immediate impulses	Delaying action and considering consequences
Trokal	Persistent and responsible effort	Working, learning, and developing skills
Acceptance	Recognising limits and avoiding excess	Not forcing outcomes or pursuing unnecessary consumption
Sincerity	Acting without expectation of reward	Helping through labour, food, or simple contributions
Non-arbitrariness	Respecting humans and nature	Avoiding damage and taking only what is appropriate
Ngangsu kawruh	Learning through dialogue	Asking, listening, and exchanging knowledge
Gratitude toward the earth	Recognising dependence on nature	Caring for soil, water, forests, and residential spaces

Table 3 shows that environmental behaviour was embedded in broader moral conduct rather than separated into a distinct category. The data associated resource protection with restraint, fairness, responsibility, and recognition of human dependence on the earth. These values were represented both verbally and through observed practices.

The transmission of these values occurred across three principal social settings: family, community, and school. The family was described as the first and most frequent setting for children's moral education. Parents used advice, reminders, and direct examples when children made mistakes. The interview data emphasised that teaching was not primarily based on harsh coercion. Instead, adults used repetition and modelling to guide behaviour.

Community spaces provided opportunities for children to participate in gamelan, karawitan, festivals, sedekah bumi or nyadran, and mutual-assistance activities. The annual earth ceremony and related festivals placed environmental gratitude within collective practice. Participation in gamelan required children to wait for their turn, follow a shared rhythm, and coordinate different instruments. The data recorded these activities as social learning rather than formal environmental lessons.

The primary school represented a potential link between formal education and local cultural knowledge. Interview statements indicated that teachers should understand the community surrounding the school rather than limiting instruction to standardised classroom content. Teachers identified local stories, songs, cultural monuments, forest areas, traditional houses, and community activities as possible learning resources. However, the data did not document a formally implemented school curriculum based on these materials.

Visual documentation expanded the findings beyond spoken language. The forest conservation area showed the proximity of cultural identity to a managed natural space. The pitutur luhur monument displayed moral teachings in a permanent visual form, particularly the regulation of thought, speech, and action. Traditional houses presented a relatively simple physical form, while the cultural hall functioned as a site for collective practice. The craftsperson's house contained instruments, puppets, and cultural materials associated with skill development and local production.

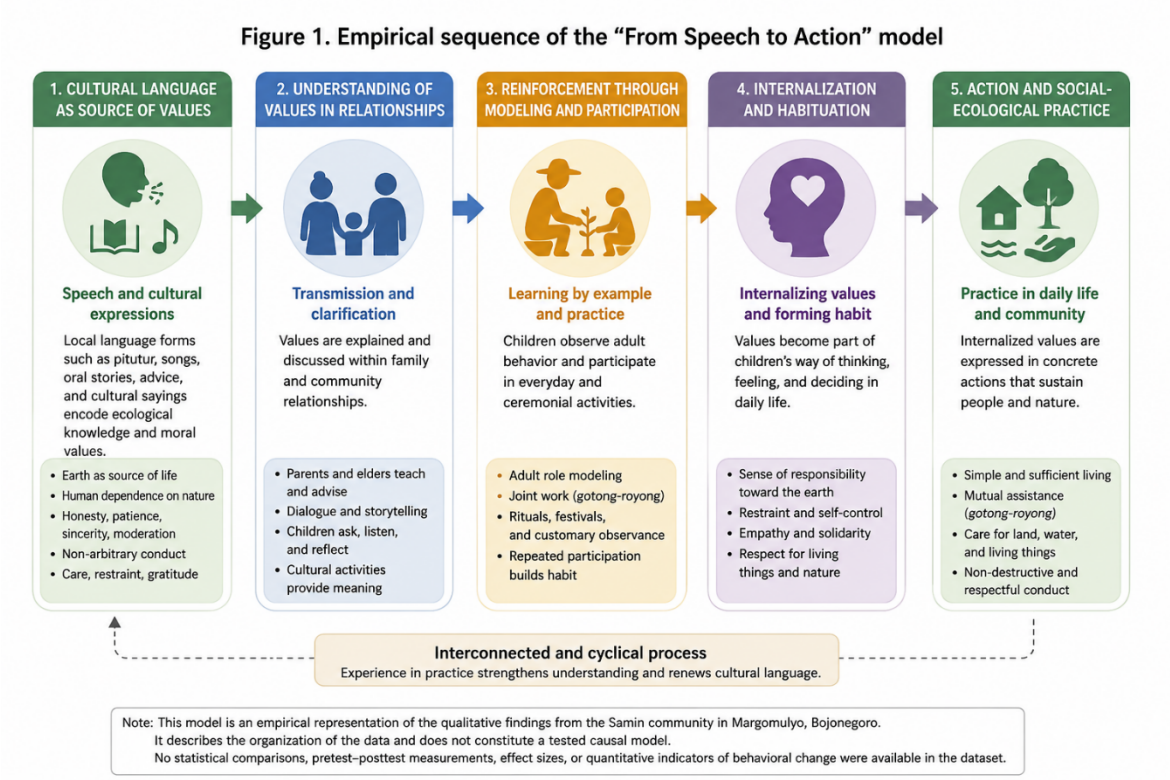


Figure 1. Empirical sequence of the "From Speech to Action" model

Figure 1 summarises the five-stage sequence derived from the dataset. Cultural language provided the initial source of values; family and community relationships then clarified these values, examples and repeated participation reinforced them, and practices such as simple living, mutual assistance, restraint, respect for the earth, and non-destructive conduct expressed them. The model represents the organisation of the qualitative findings and does not constitute a tested causal model. The dataset contains no statistical comparisons, pretest–posttest measurements, effect sizes, or quantitative indicators of behavioural change.

The findings indicate that Samin language functions as more than a medium of communication; it organises ecological knowledge, transmits moral expectations, and connects cultural identity with everyday environmental conduct. This pattern is consistent with evidence that lexical structures and culturally specific semantic associations shape how people conceptualise nature and direct attention toward particular ecological relationships. (Lewis et al., 2023; Malt & Majid, 2023). In the present study, songs, pitutur, stories, and family advice framed the earth as a source of life and linked environmental responsibility to honesty, restraint, sincerity, and non-arbitrary conduct. These results also correspond with ethnolinguistic and ecopedagogical studies showing that myths, rituals, school texts, signage, and picturebooks transmit environmental knowledge and sustainability values through culturally meaningful discourse. (Huang, 2023; Maulidina & Prastio, 2024)(Subramaniam et al., 2025)(Sumarlam et al., 2021).

The results extend previous research by integrating cognitive-linguistic and educational perspectives. Cognitive studies mainly emphasise how language structures environmental concepts, whereas educational studies focus on curriculum, teacher leadership, and place-based experience as mechanisms for behavioural internalisation (Malt & Majid, 2023; Vizina, 2022). The Samin case shows that both mechanisms operate together. Ideational meanings represent the earth and human dependence on it; interpersonal meanings establish advice, dialogue, and adult modelling; and textual meanings organise teachings into memorable songs, narratives, and value

sequences. Halliday's metafunctions therefore provide a useful explanation of how environmental meanings become socially reinforced and practically enacted.

Theoretically, the study supports a culturally situated model of environmental education. Local language strengthens internalisation by aligning ecological meanings with children's cultural schemas, linking values to collective identity, and embedding learning in familiar social and spatial contexts. (Lewis et al., 2023)(Rero et al., 2025)(Vizina, 2022). The "From Speech to Action" model contributes by specifying a sequence from culturally encoded discourse to value understanding, social reinforcement, habituation, and environmental practice. Similar pathways are visible in ethno-ecological camps, craft-based learning, and Indigenous place-based programs that combine language, practical knowledge, and conservation. (Sajjad et al., 2024)(Sleptsov et al., 2024)(Неустроева et al., 2023).

Practically, primary schools in Samin areas could integrate local stories, songs, cultural monuments, community practices, and environmental observations into multilingual learning materials. Teacher development should also emphasise place-based pedagogy, systems thinking, and collaboration with families and cultural custodians. At the policy level, ESD and local-content curricula should include local knowledge through community-approved textbooks, signage, picturebooks, and field activities. (Maulidina & Prastio, 2024)(Subramaniam et al., 2025).

Several limitations remain. The dataset focused on one locality and relied heavily on a single principal informant; children's voices and longitudinal evidence of behavioural change were limited. Future research should test locally developed interventions through comparative, experimental, or longitudinal designs; involve multiple generations; evaluate teacher professional development; and measure changes in environmental understanding and behaviour.

4. Conclusion

The study confirms that environmental education within the Samin community is embedded in everyday linguistic and cultural practices. Pitutur, songs, oral histories, parental advice, and participation in communal activities convey ecological meanings. These forms of communication encourage children to recognise human dependence on the earth and to associate environmental responsibility with honesty, patience, moderation, persistence, sincerity, mutual assistance, and respect for living environments. The findings also show that ecological learning develops gradually: children encounter culturally encoded messages, understand their moral meaning, observe adult examples, repeatedly participate in community practices, and translate these experiences into social and environmental conduct.

These results suggest treating local language as a pedagogical resource rather than supplementary cultural content. Primary schools in Samin areas can apply the findings by incorporating local narratives, songs, community spaces, traditional practices, and environmental observations into classroom and field-based learning. Teachers should work with parents, elders, and cultural practitioners to ensure that materials remain contextually accurate and culturally appropriate.

Educational authorities should support multilingual local-content curricula, teacher training in place-based environmental education, and community-school partnerships. Future applications should include developing and classroom-testing Samin-language learning materials, followed by systematic evaluation of their effects on children's environmental understanding, value internalisation, and everyday behaviour.

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