



Kasepuhan Banten Kidul: Exploring Local Wisdom Through Reading Culture

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Abstract. This ethnographic research on local wisdom through reading culture aims to determine the contribution of the reading culture in the community to the preservation of local wisdom. Kasepuhan Banten Kidul continues to uphold its local wisdom traditions amid modernization. One important aspect of local wisdom that deserves exploration is the reading culture. The researcher conducted observations, reading interest surveys, and in-depth interviews with the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community regarding local wisdom. The results indicate that the reading practices of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community are dominated by interest in folktales, prayers, and mantras. The abundance of fictional books in the form of manuscripts and the chief's encouragement to study local wisdom serve as motivation. The reading culture is reflected in the recitation of prayers and mantras performed on various occasions in life, such as the *hajat bumi* ritual, *seren tahun* ceremony, *ngarengkong*, and *ngahuma*.

Keywords: Kasepuhan Banten Kidul, Local Wisdom, Reading Culture.

1 Introduction

Kasepuhan Banten Kidul is one of the indigenous communities located in Banten Province. This Sundanese ethnic group resides around Mount Halimun, particularly in the western region of Sukabumi Regency extending to Lebak Regency, and northward into the southern area of Bogor Regency. The Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community encompasses several traditional and semi-traditional villages that still recognize local customary leadership. There are several Kasepuhan, including Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, Kasepuhan Cisungsang, Kasepuhan Cisitu, Kasepuhan Cicarucub, Kasepuhan Citorek, and Kasepuhan Cibedug [4].

This community is known for its ability to preserve traditions and local wisdom amid the increasingly strong currents of modernization. Oral traditions and ancient manuscripts containing folktales, customary laws, as well as moral and spiritual teachings, are an integral part of the community's daily life. One important aspect of local wisdom worth exploring is the reading culture. The reading culture in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul encompasses not only basic literacy but also a deep understanding of cultural values, history, and local knowledge that has been passed down through generations [9]. Understanding how this reading culture plays a role in maintaining and

transmitting local wisdom can provide valuable insights into the sustainability of this community [1].

In the current era of modernization and digitalization, the reading culture in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul faces various challenges that may threaten its sustainability. One of the main challenges faced by the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community is the limited access to reading materials. The remote geographical location and limited infrastructure make the distribution of books and reading materials difficult. Public libraries are rarely found, and the collection of books in schools is very limited. This results in a low availability of quality reading materials for the community, especially for children and teenagers who are in the process of developing their literacy skills. The Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community is increasingly exposed to digital technology and social media. While digital technology brings many benefits, such as easier access to information and communication, it also presents its own challenges. Children and teenagers tend to be more interested in digital entertainment, such as video games and social media, rather than reading books [12]. Information and technology has extensively changed the trends and behaviors of the student's reading habits, which slowly moving away from printed books to online source materials [2].

The objectives of this study are: 1) to identify the reading culture of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community, and 2) to analyze the contribution of the reading culture to the preservation of local wisdom in the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community. The results of this research are expected to provide benefits in the form of: 1) an understanding of the importance of reading culture, and 2) considerations in formulating policies related to the reading culture of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community.

Reading is the activity of understanding, interpreting, and remembering reading information [15]. Besides, some individuals consider reading activity as a complex process integrating all aspects of human behaviours and demanding varied and continued instructional guidance to read precisely, to appraise and to relate to others during a significant way [8]. Ideally, reading should be an ingrained culture within us. However, the reading culture, particularly among teenagers, is lacking in interest. In this context, the readings referred to are those that contain knowledge that can broaden one's horizons [6]. Most teenagers prefer to read materials that are entertaining, such as comics, novels, and magazines [7]. The results of the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate a decline in scores, particularly in the reading domain. The reading score for PISA 2022 dropped by 12 points to 359 from 371 in 2018. This decline in PISA scores serves as a lesson for all of us to improve the quality of the reading culture in the future.

Jene [5, p. 4] argues that a person's reading culture is an action, or attitude and behavior in reading, that is carried out regularly and continuously. Culture arises from activities that are commonly performed and then become a habit. There are two factors that influence reading culture: internal factors and external factors [16]. Indicators of reading culture include motivation, interest, and reading habits, reading materials, as well as reading ability.

Integrating local wisdom into the reading culture can foster a deeper connection with cultural roots and provide valuable insights into the traditions and values upheld by the

community. All the inhabitants of the village must unite, having one strong aim, or 'gilig' like a Sego Golong. This is a manifestation of Javanese teaching about the ethics of harmony and working together [3]. Through collaborative efforts to incorporate local wisdom into various aspects of community life, individuals can ensure the sustainability and continuity of cultural heritage for future generations [9].

2 Methods

This research is an ethnographic study related to the reading culture and local wisdom present in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul. Ethnography is an empirical and theoretical approach aimed at obtaining in-depth descriptions and analyses of culture based on intensive field research. The researcher conducted participant observation by observing and participating in the daily activities of the community to understand the reading culture practices. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders and members who play a role in reading literacy activities. The customary leader served as an informant.

Table 1. Informant Identities.

No	Names	Roles
1	Abah Oyok Didi	Head of Citorek Customary Leadership
2	Abah Oyot Enjay	Head of Cicarucub Customary Leadership
3	Abah Usep Suyatma	Head of Cisungsang Customary Leadership
4	Abah Deden	Head of Cisitu Customary Leadership
5	Dc Aryadi	Head of TBM Forum Lebak

The researcher processes the research data from both observations and interviews by reducing the data. The presentation of the data is arranged so that the results of the reduction are structured in a narrative description pattern for easier understanding. The researcher draws conclusion based on the findings.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Local Wisdom of Kasepuhan Banten Kidul

The Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community in Lebak Regency is known for its social life that is guided by *tatali paranti karuhun* (customary traditions inherited from ancestors). The Kasepuhan community is open and does not isolate itself from modern lifestyles, as long as these do not conflict with the customary laws that serve as the foundation of their culture [10].

The Kasepuhan community is adaptive rather than primitive, which allows for the acceptance of modern technology or innovations, although some uses of technology are still not permitted, a concept referred to as *can nepi ka zaman*, meaning "it's not yet the time." The Kasepuhan community adheres to the philosophy of *hirup kudu ngigeulan*

zaman, which reflects their openness to changes in the times to achieve a balance between customary rules and current conditions. However, this openness does not automatically eliminate old traditions or replace them with new methods. Certain rules are still maintained, ensuring that the authenticity or essence of those traditions does not undergo change.

The values of local wisdom embodied in *tatali paranti karuhun* are reflected not only in religious aspects but also manifest in social life, leadership systems, and ways of interacting with nature. Forms of local wisdom can be found through various aspects of human life, one of which is reflected in the socialization practices of the indigenous community.

Seren Taun. Seren Taun is a traditional ceremony practiced by the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community, particularly among farmers, to express gratitude and prayers for the harvest. This tradition holds significance related to the transition from one year to the next, where the word "seren" means surrender or transfer, and "taun" means year [11].

The first step in the preparation process is the determination of the ceremony date, known as '*Neteupkeun*.' The customary leaders, village elders, and local community members pray and hold discussions to decide on the date for the Seren Taun ceremony. *Neteupkeun* is usually conducted at night. After the ceremony date is determined, a pilgrimage to the ancestors' graves takes place, where the customary leaders and village elders perform *Ngembang* or a visit to the graves of their ancestors to inform them that the Seren Taun ceremony will be held on the agreed-upon date. The Seren Taun ritual is carried out through four ceremonies over seven days. The sequence of events includes:

- (1) *Damar Sewu* (First Day): An opening ritual meaning "a thousand lanterns," serving as a light for the soul.
- (2) *Pesta Dadung* (Second Day): An expression of farmers' love for their work and prayers, managing the rice fields and protecting them from any disturbances..
- (3) *Malam Kidung Spiritual* (Third Day): A spiritual activity involving various religions, customs, and beliefs..
- (4) Peak of the Seren Taun Ceremony (Fourth Day): This consists of artistic offerings, *ngajayak* as a presentation of agricultural products, and *babarit*, which includes a series of spiritual songs and prayers or mantras known as *rajah pwahaci*.

The Banten Kidul community selects customary leaders who have the authority to determine the date for the Seren Taun ceremony. These leaders are typically chosen based on their background and experience in carrying out the Seren Taun tradition [13].

Sedekah Bumi. Sedekah Bumi is a ceremony of giving back to the earth that is held after the harvest season to express gratitude to Dewi Sri (the goddess of rice) and to pray for blessings and safety from God Almighty [14]. An important aspect of this tradition includes *bubur tiis*, buffalo, and agricultural produce for consumption, with the leftovers buried. The elders perform the ritual of slaughtering a buffalo as a token of gratitude for the abundant harvest.

The costs of Sedekah Bumi can come from individual contributions or be given freely. The method of slaughtering animals during Sedekah Bumi differs from other animal slaughtering practices. The elders provide 12 signs to determine whether the land is permissible for use. These signs are placed in various locations, and if they disappear the next day, it signifies that the area is not allowed for burying the buffalo or other items. If the signs remain in place, then that location is permitted for burial. During the buffalo slaughtering process, the head, legs, tail, and internal organs are not cooked for consumption; only the meat is eaten.

The burial process during Sedekah Bumi in Kasepuhan Banten Kidul involves positioning the buffalo's head facing south, with its legs placed to the right and left of the head, and the tail positioned behind the head. This is accompanied by village chicken eggs, plates, glasses, spoons, and leftover meat or food. During the burial process, the elders wear white cloth. Four individuals recite the adhan (call to prayer) while facing the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west). The burial prayer for the Sedekah Bumi animal is known only to certain individuals.

Ngarengkong. *Ngarengkong* or *ngunjal pare*, is a traditional practice among the indigenous community of lifting rice from the fields to be transferred to the rice barn (*leuit*). The *rengkong* is a tool or object made from bamboo, tied with *ijuk* (coconut fiber). The *leuit* resembles a mini stilt house made of wood, complete with a roof made of *ijuk* or palm leaves. This traditional ceremony of *ngarengkong* is held annually on a Sunday. The customary leaders wear white clothing, while the community members wear blue attire. During the *ngarengkong* ceremony, all members of the community are welcome to participate, but only men are specifically involved in the ceremony, especially when lifting the *rengkong*.

The harvesting of rice is done using an *etem*, a small knife used for cutting rice, which is made from bamboo to hold a small blade. Both men and women participate in this process. With the *ani-ani*, the grain stalks are cut one by one, rather than cutting all the stalks at once. This method allows them to selectively harvest the rice that has ripened while leaving the unripe grains behind. In one day, they can harvest from six boxes of rice fields, and after the rice is collected, it is dried for three weeks. Each person carries two bundles, with one bundle containing three *pocong* (a traditional measurement). The rice produced from the *ngarengkong* ritual cannot be sold; instead, it is stored in traditional rice barns for times of scarcity, cultural events, or for those in need. This reflects a form of social and cultural life that is worthy of preservation.

Ngahuma. *Ngahuma* is an agricultural practice that involves clearing land in the forest for cultivation. This tradition has been passed down through generations by the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community. *Ngahuma* includes a series of customary ceremonies aimed at seeking protection and blessings from ancestors and the universe [1]. The *Ngahuma* tradition begins with land clearing (*Ngaseuk*). The *Ngaseuk* stage involves opening new land or cleaning existing land from leftover plants using an *aseuk* (a pointed stick) as a place to plant seeds. This process is carried out collaboratively by all members of the community. The *Ngaseuk* ceremony begins when the community leader descends to the cultivated land to lead the ritual, marking the start of the rice

planting season. The recitation of prayers and mantras is a vital part of the life of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community, reflecting their connection to tradition, spirituality, and local wisdom. This practice not only shows respect for ancestors and deities but also serves as a means to maintain balance and harmony in daily life.

3.2 The Reading Culture of the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul Community

Internal and external factors influence reading culture [16]. Researchers identified several indicators of reading culture, including sources of reading materials, reading interests, motivation, and reading habits. The researchers also described community perceptions using the criteria of Agree (S), Disagree (TS), and No Opinion (TMP).

Table 2. Sources of Reading Materials.

Demension	Indicator	Categori %		
		S	TS	TMP
Reading Source Factors	I have 5 types of reading materials.	84	16	0
	I have 10 types of reading materials	61	39	0
	I have more knowledge books.	48	19	33
	I have more fiction books	49	46	5
	I have a library membership card.	16	72	12
	The Kasepuhan has a reading corner	13	78	9
Average %		37,4	50,8	11,8

The availability of reading materials in the community certainly influences the reading culture. Table 2 above shows that the majority of the community has five types of books, primarily dominated by fiction. This is further compounded by the lack of reading corners in the community.

The Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community is generally open to the developments of the times, especially in education. However, some villages face challenges due to limited access to reading materials. The remote geographic location and limited infrastructure make the distribution of books and reading materials difficult. Relying on reading corners provided by the government or community is insufficient to support a robust reading culture. The community leader creates manuscripts consisting of traditional poetry, mantras, and stories related to their traditions. The ownership of reading materials within the community reaches 49%, predominantly consisting of fiction books.

Table 3. Factors Influence of Reading Habits.

Demension	Indicator	Categori %		
		S	TS	TMP
Reading Habits	I spend more than 2 hours per week reading.	100	0	0
	I read at least 6 times a week	52	23	25
	I often visit and read at the library.	48	52	0
	I read in the Kasepuhan reading corner	27	15	58
	I read books during school hours.	81	9	10
	I read books in the evening	49	18	33
	I prepare the books I will read in an easily accessible place.	98	2	0
	I have a regular schedule for reading every day.	39	61	0
Average %		61,75	22,5	15,75

Reading habits contribute 61.75% to the formation of a reading culture. Based on the activities carried out by the community, the indicators that significantly influence the development of these habits include the willingness to prepare accessible books and the effort to read for two hours per week. Conversely, a key indicator that has yet to develop well in the community is the lack of a regular reading schedule each day. Establishing a consistent reading schedule is essential for cultivating discipline and building reading habits.

To enhance reading habits, the community needs to improve discipline by creating a regular reading timetable. In preserving the local wisdom of Kasepuhan Banten Kidul, several villages encourage community gatherings at reading corners to discuss rituals and traditions. Additionally, the library forum conducts mobile library programs to increase the community's reading hours.

Table 4. Factors Influence of Reading Motivation.

Demension	Indicator	Categori %		
		S	TS	TMP
Motivational Factors	I feel valued when I receive praise from teachers or friends after finishing a reading.	78	22	0
	I want to achieve high accomplishments through diligent reading.	73	27	0
	I read primarily for entertainment.	78	15	7
	I read because there is a reward.	38	62	0
	I read because there is a requirement.	83	12	5
	My parents participate in reading activities.	27	49	24
	My parents provide reading materials.	33	67	0
Average %		58,57	36,28	5,14

Based on the activities and attitudes of the community, the influence of motivational factors on the formation of a reading culture contributes 70%. Strong indicators affecting the development of this reading culture include praise from teachers and peers, the desire to achieve high academic performance, encouragement to read during exams, having clear reading goals for both entertainment and rewards, and parental involvement. The greatest motivation for reading activities comes from praise received

from parents and friends, as well as the pursuit of entertainment. The role of parents is particularly important in motivating reading, both through participation in reading activities and guidance on the outcomes of what is read. The Kasepuhan community primarily engages with fictional texts, such as traditional stories and mantras, highlighting the need for active participation in the reading process.

Table 5. Factors Influence of Reading Interest.

Demension	Indicator	Categori %		
		S	TS	TMP
Reading Interest	I enjoy reading science books.	37	51	12
	I enjoy reading fiction.	74	26	0
	I like books that have interesting colors and images.	69	31	0
	I will read if the book is engaging, even if it's not in my field of study.	29	63	8
	I will read what I enjoy	100	0	0
Average %		61,8	34,2	4

The interest in reading contributes 61.8% to the formation of a reading culture. Key indicators that strongly influence on this reading culture include enjoyment of reading and a preference for fiction as the type of material read. Interest in fictional readings, particularly local wisdom manuscripts, is often motivated by the desire to become a community leader. In this context, community leaders are chosen based on their experience in upholding and practicing local traditions.

A decline in reading interest among the younger generation poses a serious problem. Many children prefer instant and entertaining activities over reading, which requires concentration and time. This low reading motivation can stem from a lack of support from the surrounding environment, insufficient role models from parents or community leaders who enjoy reading, and a scarcity of engaging and interactive literacy programs. With the influx of external cultural influences through digital media and modernization, there has been a shift in values and traditions within the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community. Oral traditions and the habit of reading ancient texts are becoming marginalized. This trend threatens the preservation of local knowledge and cultural identity maintained through reading practices. Strengthening efforts from community leaders, government agencies, and local organizations are essential to safeguard and preserve this cultural heritage.

Exploring the social and cultural changes, particularly in reading culture within the Kasepuhan Adat Banten Kidul community, illustrates their adaptation to societal dynamics while preserving traditional values. This reflects the resilience and adaptability of indigenous communities like Kasepuhan Banten Kidul in navigating modern influences while safeguarding their cultural heritage. Through the preservation of local wisdom and sustainable reading practices, this community continues to evolve amidst a constantly changing social landscape, remaining rooted in the customs of their ancestors.

4 Conclusion

Indigenous communities like Kasepuhan Banten Kidul recognize that reading culture is vital in preserving oral traditions and ancient manuscripts that embody cultural values and moral teachings. A sociocultural approach to literacy highlights the importance of community and family involvement in shaping reading habits. Additionally, digital literacy can effectively address limitations in access to reading materials, provided it is used wisely and in harmony with local cultural contexts. By fostering a strong reading culture, the community can ensure the continuation of their rich heritage while adapting to modern challenges.

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