



Intergenerational learning in the Baduy community: Family literacy through an intergenerational learning approach

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Abstract

Research on intergenerational learning and family literacy has expanded considerably over recent decades. However, these fields have largely developed independently, particularly within Indigenous communities where knowledge transmission occurs through cultural participation rather than formal educational institutions. This study aims to examine how intergenerational learning contributes to the formation of family literacy within the Baduy community and to develop a culturally grounded understanding of literacy based on Indigenous learning practices. An ethnographic approach was employed in the Baduy community of Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving customary leaders, parents, and children. Data analysis followed Spradley's ethnographic framework, including domain, taxonomic, componential, and cultural theme analysis. The findings indicate that intergenerational learning serves as the primary mechanism for transmitting knowledge, practical skills, cultural values, and social norms across generations through observation, participation, imitation, and oral communication. Family literacy is embedded in cultural participation, oral traditions, symbolic communication, and experiential learning rather than solely in text-based practices. In conclusion, family literacy in the Baduy community is formed through culturally embedded intergenerational learning processes that sustain local knowledge and cultural identity. This study contributes by integrating intergenerational learning and family literacy into a unified analytical framework and highlights the importance of families and communities as central sites of lifelong learning within Indigenous contexts.

Introduction

Within global discourse, education is generally positioned as a structured and institutionalized process delivered through formal systems, with an emphasis on the attainment of measurable academic competencies. This paradigm tends to place schools as the primary center for the production and distribution of knowledge, while learning practices that occur outside formal institutions are often viewed as supplementary or even marginalized. Critiques of the dominance of this paradigm are further reinforced by various recent studies indicating that formal education systems have not fully been able to accommodate the diversity of learners' social and cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western societies. From the perspective of nonformal education and lifelong learning, learning processes are instead understood as phenomena that take place contextually, flexibly, and in an integrated manner within everyday life (Jarvis, 2012). Nevertheless, in Indigenous/customary community contexts, educational processes develop organically through social interaction, cultural practices, and everyday lived experiences that are not formally institutionalized. Ethnographic studies show that Indigenous communities possess local



knowledge systems (indigenous knowledge) that are transmitted through complex and sustained social mechanisms (Battiste, 2013).

One prominent form of learning in this context is intergenerational learning, namely learning processes that occur through interactions across generations within families and communities. The international literature indicates that intergenerational learning contributes to strengthening social cohesion, knowledge transfer, and the development of social capital within society (Hatton-Yeo, 2008; L. & Wenger, 2014). Recent research also affirms that intergenerational learning plays a significant role in transmitting cultural values and collective identity, particularly in communities that maintain local traditions (Kaplan, Sánchez, 2017; Sánchez, Whitehouse, 2020). In addition, from a lifelong learning perspective, cross-generational interactions are viewed as an effective strategy for building knowledge sustainability and strengthening community social resilience. However, most studies still focus on modern societal contexts and are developed in the form of structured programs oriented toward improving academic literacy. This suggests that understandings of intergenerational learning remain dominated by an institutional perspective and have not fully accommodated learning practices that evolve naturally within Indigenous/customary communities (Worth, 2015).

At the same time, scholarship on literacy has evolved from a technical understanding toward a socio-cultural perspective. Literacy is no longer viewed solely as the ability to read and write but rather as a social practice embedded in everyday life and shaped by cultural contexts (Gee, 2015; Street, 2003). This perspective is reinforced by the New Literacy Studies framework, which emphasizes that literacy consists of multiple forms rooted in diverse social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). In this view, literacy reflects the values, norms, and social structures of a community. However, the concept of family literacy in many studies remains largely associated with text-based interactions and parental involvement in supporting children's formal education (Hannon, 2000). Research conducted in developing countries also suggests that school-oriented family literacy programs are often insufficiently contextualized for communities where learning is primarily based on oral communication and direct participation in daily activities (Rogers, 2019). Consequently, prevailing family literacy frameworks may not adequately explain literacy practices in communities where written texts are not the primary medium of learning.

In this context, the Baduy community in Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, presents a compelling phenomenon for investigation. As an Indigenous/customary community that consistently maintains ancestral values and traditions, the Baduy do not adopt a formal education system, yet they are still able to transmit knowledge, skills, and cultural values effectively from one generation to the next. Research on the Baduy community indicates that their local knowledge system is passed down through everyday practices rich in symbolic meaning and local wisdom (Permana, 2010; Susilo, 2020). Learning processes occur through daily activities such as farming, weaving, and social interaction within the family and community. Other studies also affirm that learning mechanisms in the Baduy community are participatory and grounded in experiential learning, in which children learn through observation, imitation, and direct involvement in social activities (Jadhav, 2026; Suryadi, 2018). This indicates that education does not always depend on formal institutions; rather, it can develop through culturally grounded social mechanisms.

This phenomenon suggests the existence of a form of literacy that differs from dominant text-based paradigms. Literacy within the Baduy community appears to be grounded in experience, values, and cultural participation rather than written texts. Such a perspective aligns with the concept of situated literacy, which views literacy as a contextual practice embedded within specific social activities (Hamilton, 2012; Street, 2014). In Indigenous communities, literacy may manifest through the ability to understand cultural symbols, social norms, and practical skills transmitted from one generation to another (Schwab, 2012). Therefore, literacy can be understood not merely as a technical competence but as a culturally situated capacity for meaningful participation in social life.

Despite growing scholarly attention to intergenerational learning and family literacy, a significant research gap remains. Although studies on intergenerational learning have demonstrated its contribution to knowledge transmission, social cohesion, and lifelong learning (Kaplan, Sánchez, 2017; Sánchez, Whitehouse, 2020), and family literacy research has highlighted the role of families in supporting learning processes (Horn, 2012), these two strands of scholarship have largely evolved separately. Existing studies predominantly examine intergenerational learning within structured educational programs and family literacy within text-based educational settings. Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how intergenerational learning and family literacy interact organically within Indigenous communities where knowledge is transmitted through cultural practices rather than formal schooling. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, including the Baduy community, where family-based learning remains deeply embedded in everyday life. Furthermore, previous studies on the Baduy community have primarily focused on cultural preservation, local wisdom, and indigenous knowledge systems, while providing limited explanation of how intergenerational learning contributes to the formation of family literacy practices.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to examine how intergenerational learning shapes family literacy within the Baduy community. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) identify the forms and mechanisms of intergenerational learning practiced within Baduy families and communities; (2) analyze how family literacy is constructed through socio-cultural practices and everyday experiences; and (3) develop a culturally grounded conceptual model of family literacy based on Indigenous learning practices.

This study offers three principal contributions. First, unlike previous studies that have examined intergenerational learning and family literacy as separate phenomena, this study integrates both concepts within a single analytical framework situated in an Indigenous community context. Second, while most family literacy studies focus on text-based literacy practices associated with formal education, this research extends the concept by demonstrating how literacy emerges through cultural participation, oral traditions, and experiential learning. Third, the study develops a culturally grounded conceptual model of family literacy derived from Indigenous learning practices within the Baduy community. These contributions enrich nonformal education scholarship by providing an alternative perspective on literacy development outside formal educational institutions and by broadening the theoretical understanding of family literacy in culturally diverse contexts.

Methods

This study employed an ethnographic approach to develop an in-depth understanding of intergenerational learning practices in the Baduy community, drawing on the stages developed (Spradley, 2007). Ethnography was selected because it enables researchers to explore the meanings, values, and cultural practices that operate in communities' natural settings, as well as to understand how knowledge is socially transmitted across generations (Atkinson, 2019; Poth, 2018). In the context of nonformal education and Indigenous/customary communities, ethnography is considered relevant because it can reveal learning systems that are not formally structured yet exhibit strong cultural patterns and logics (Kral & Schwab, 2012; Rogers, 2019).

The research was conducted in Kanekes Village, Leuwidamar District, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia, which is recognized as the customary territory of the Baduy people. The research site was selected purposively because the Baduy community maintains a distinctive indigenous knowledge system and relies primarily on family and community-based learning rather than formal educational institutions. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in cultural transmission and community learning activities. Informants included customary leaders, parents, and children who actively participated in everyday social and cultural practices. These participants were considered capable of providing comprehensive information regarding intergenerational learning processes and family literacy practices within the community.

Tabel 1. Participants and Data Sources

Customary leaders	Customary leaders	Customary leaders
Customary leaders	3 persons	In-depth interviews
Parents	8 peprsons	Interviews and participant observation
Children	10 persons	Participant observation
Cultural artifacts	15 artifacts	Documentation
Field note	20 record	Participant observation

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: in-depth ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain participants' perspectives regarding cultural transmission, learning experiences, and family literacy practices. Participant observation enabled the researcher to directly observe learning activities occurring naturally within everyday settings, including farming, weaving, household activities, and customary ceremonies. Documentation involved the collection and analysis of field notes, photographs, cultural artifacts, and other relevant materials that provided contextual evidence of learning practices and cultural knowledge transmission. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, participant observations, and documentation. Methodological triangulation enabled the researcher to validate emerging findings across different sources of evidence and reduce potential bias arising from reliance on a single data source.

The data were analyzed using Spradley's ethnographic analysis framework, which consists of domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. Domain analysis was conducted to identify broad categories of cultural knowledge related to learning and literacy. Taxonomic analysis was then used to examine relationships among categories. Componential analysis explored similarities and differences across cultural meanings and practices, while cultural theme analysis synthesized findings into overarching themes that explain the relationship between intergenerational learning and family literacy within the Baduy community.

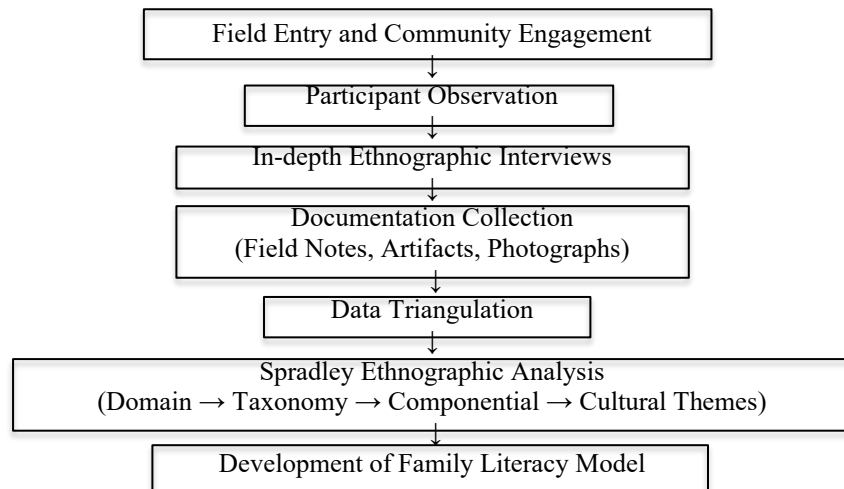


Figure 1. Research Procedure

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from participants, and all information was treated confidentially. The researcher also respected local customs, cultural values, and community protocols during fieldwork to ensure culturally appropriate research practices.

Results

Intergenerational Learning Through Participation in Daily Activities

The findings indicate that intergenerational learning in the Baduy community occurs naturally through participation in everyday activities. Learning is not organized through formal instruction but is embedded within daily social and cultural practices. Children acquire knowledge and skills by accompanying adults in farming, weaving, collecting forest products, and participating in customary activities. Evidence from Interviews, A customary leader explained:

“Kami tidak mengajarkan dengan sekolah. Anak-anak belajar dengan melihat dan mengikuti apa yang dilakukan orang tua dan orang tua adat.”

Similarly, a parent stated:

“Kalau anak ikut ke ladang setiap hari, lama-lama dia tahu sendiri bagaimana cara menanam, membersihkan lahan, dan menjaga tanaman.”

These statements indicate that learning is acquired through direct participation rather than explicit instruction.



Figure 2. Children participating in farming activities alongside their parents as a form of experiential and intergenerational learning

Evidence from Participant Observation, participant observation revealed that children frequently accompanied their parents to agricultural fields. During farming activities, children observed planting techniques, land preparation, and crop maintenance. Researchers observed that adults rarely provided formal explanations. Instead, children learned through repeated observation and involvement in routine activities. In weaving activities, young girls were observed sitting beside older women and gradually imitating weaving techniques. Learning occurred informally through participation and practice rather than through structured teaching.



Figure 3. Intergenerational transmission of weaving skills through observation and guided participation

Field notes and photographic documentation showed that agricultural tools, weaving equipment, and household artifacts served as practical learning media. These cultural objects functioned as repositories of local knowledge that facilitated intergenerational transmission. The findings suggest that experiential participation constitutes the primary mechanism through which knowledge is transmitted across generations.

Transmission of Cultural Values Through Family Interaction

Beyond practical knowledge, intergenerational learning serves as a mechanism for transmitting cultural values and social norms. Evidence from Interviews, One customary leader stated:

“Kami mendidik masyarakat bukan untuk menjadi pintar, tetapi untuk menjadi jujur. Orang pintar bisa berubah, tetapi orang jujur akan menjaga adat.”

This statement illustrates that learning within the Baduy community prioritizes moral values and cultural integrity.



Figure 4. Family interaction as a medium for transmitting customary values and social norms

Evidence from Participant Observation, researchers observed that parents consistently involved children in community gatherings, customary ceremonies, and collective work activities. During these

interactions, children were introduced to customary rules, respectful behavior, and community responsibilities. Documentation of customary ceremonies demonstrated that cultural events functioned as learning spaces where values such as cooperation, obedience, humility, and environmental stewardship were transmitted. These findings indicate that intergenerational learning operates not only as a knowledge transmission process but also as a mechanism for preserving cultural identity.

Family Literacy as Cultural Participation

The findings demonstrate that family literacy in the Baduy community extends beyond reading and writing practices. Literacy is embedded in cultural participation, oral communication, and experiential learning. Evidence from Interviews, Parents described storytelling, conversations, and shared participation in everyday activities as important means of teaching children. One parent stated:

“Anak belajar dari cerita orang tua, dari apa yang dilihat setiap hari, dan dari ikut kegiatan adat.”



Figure 5. Oral storytelling as a family literacy practice within the Baduy community

Evidence from Participant Observation, researchers observed frequent storytelling activities within family settings. Oral narratives were used to communicate customary values, environmental knowledge, and social responsibilities. Children demonstrated an understanding of community norms, cultural symbols, and traditional practices despite limited exposure to formal literacy instruction.



Figure 6. Participation in cultural practices as a form of literacy development

Field notes documented various oral traditions and symbolic practices that functioned as literacy resources within the community. Cultural symbols, customary expressions, and traditional narratives served as media for transmitting knowledge and meaning. These findings suggest that literacy within the Baduy community should be understood as a culturally situated social practice rather than solely as a text-based competence.

Conceptual Model of Family Literacy Formation

Analysis of interview data, participant observations, and cultural documentation revealed a recurring pattern in the formation of family literacy within the Baduy community. Intergenerational learning begins through participation in family and community activities. Through observation, imitation, and direct involvement, children acquire practical knowledge, cultural values, and social norms. These experiences are reinforced through oral traditions, storytelling, and customary interactions. Over time, these processes contribute to the development of culturally grounded family literacy, which supports the continuity of local knowledge and cultural identity.

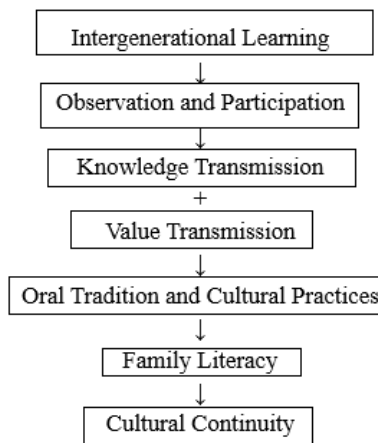


Figure 7. Family Literacy Formation in the Baduy Community

The model illustrates that family literacy emerges through continuous interaction between intergenerational learning processes and cultural participation. Rather than relying on written texts, literacy is developed through meaningful engagement with community knowledge, values, and practices.

Discussion

Intergenerational Learning as a Mechanism of Cultural Knowledge Transmission

The findings reveal that intergenerational learning within the Baduy community functions as a primary mechanism for transmitting knowledge, skills, values, and cultural norms across generations. Learning occurs through participation in daily activities such as farming, weaving, household responsibilities, and involvement in customary ceremonies. Unlike formal educational settings that rely on structured curricula and instructional approaches, learning in the Baduy community is embedded within everyday social interactions and cultural practices. These findings support the concept of experiential learning proposed by Kolb (1984), which positions experience as a central source of learning. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that learning experiences are not solely processed through individual reflection but are collectively internalized through repeated participation in culturally meaningful practices. Similar findings have been reported in Indigenous communities where learning occurs through observation, participation, and social engagement rather than formal instruction (Rogoff, 2003; Schwab, 2012). Therefore, experiential learning in Indigenous contexts should be understood not only as an individual cognitive process but also as a socio-cultural practice embedded within community life.

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory (Bandura Albert, 1977), the observation and imitation practices performed by Baduy children reflect fundamental mechanisms of social learning. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that learning is not merely dependent on behavioral modeling. The

legitimacy of knowledge is closely associated with social authority embedded within customary structures. Parents, elders, and traditional leaders function not only as learning models but also as custodians of cultural legitimacy. This finding supports previous research suggesting that learning processes in traditional communities are strongly influenced by cultural norms and social power relations that define valid knowledge (E. Wenger, 1998; L. & Wenger, 1991). More importantly, the findings refine existing intergenerational learning theory. Previous studies generally conceptualize intergenerational learning as reciprocal knowledge exchange between younger and older generations (Kaplan, Sánchez, 2017; Sánchez, Whitehouse, 2020). However, the Baduy context demonstrates that intergenerational learning simultaneously serves three interconnected functions: knowledge transmission, cultural preservation, and social regulation. Consequently, intergenerational learning should be viewed not merely as a pedagogical process but also as a cultural mechanism that sustains collective identity and social continuity.

Family Literacy as a Socio-Cultural Practice

The findings indicate that literacy within the Baduy community cannot be adequately understood through dominant text-based literacy frameworks. Literacy is embedded within oral traditions, cultural participation, social interaction, and practical engagement in community life. The ability to understand customary norms, interpret cultural symbols, and perform socially valued activities constitutes an important form of literacy within the community. These findings are consistent with the literacy-as-social-practice perspective advanced by Street (2014) and Barton and Hamilton (2012), which emphasizes that literacy is inseparable from its social and cultural context (Hamilton, 2012; Street, 2014). However, this study contributes a more nuanced understanding by demonstrating that literacy can develop and function effectively without direct dependence on written texts. Instead, literacy emerges through oral communication, symbolic practices, and experiential participation that enable individuals to engage meaningfully within their cultural environment.

The results also challenge dominant family literacy frameworks. Existing studies generally conceptualize family literacy as interactions between parents and children involving books, reading activities, and support for formal schooling (Hannon, 2000; Horn, 2012). In contrast, the Baduy community demonstrates that family literacy can develop through cultural participation and shared experiences. This finding suggests that prevailing family literacy models may be culturally bounded and insufficient for understanding literacy practices in Indigenous societies. Therefore, family literacy should be expanded beyond text-based activities to include culturally situated forms of knowledge transmission and meaning-making.

Consistent with studies among Indigenous Australian communities (Schwab, 2012), this study confirms that literacy practices are deeply embedded in everyday cultural activities. Nevertheless, unlike previous studies, the present research explicitly demonstrates how such practices are systematically reproduced through intergenerational learning processes within family settings. This finding highlights the inseparable relationship between family literacy and intergenerational learning in sustaining cultural continuity.

Theoretical Contributions to Intergenerational Learning and Family Literacy

This study contributes theoretically by integrating intergenerational learning and family literacy into a single analytical framework. Previous scholarship has largely treated these concepts as separate domains. Intergenerational learning research has focused on knowledge exchange across age groups, whereas family literacy studies have primarily examined literacy-related interactions within families. The present findings demonstrate that both processes are deeply interconnected within Indigenous learning systems. The study also extends the concept of family literacy by shifting attention from literacy as engagement with texts toward literacy as participation in culturally organized social practices. This extension is particularly relevant for Indigenous communities where oral traditions, experiential learning, and symbolic communication remain dominant mechanisms of knowledge transmission.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to the growing discourse on decolonizing education. The learning system observed within the Baduy community represents a locally grounded epistemology that operates independently from formal educational structures. This finding supports arguments advanced by [Battiste \(2013\)](#) and [Smith \(2023\)](#) regarding the importance of recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate educational frameworks. Consequently, the study challenges universalistic assumptions underlying dominant educational paradigms and emphasizes the plurality of knowledge systems that exist across cultural contexts ([Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2023](#)).

Implications for Nonformal Education and Lifelong Learning

From a nonformal education perspective, the findings reinforce the importance of family and community as central sites of lifelong learning. Learning within the Baduy community occurs continuously across the life course and is integrated into everyday activities rather than being confined to institutional settings. This finding aligns with lifelong learning theories that conceptualize learning as a lifelong and life-wide process ([Field, 2012; Jarvis, 2012](#)). The findings are also relevant to [Putnam's \(2000\)](#) theory of social capital. Strong social relationships within the Baduy community facilitate the transmission of knowledge, values, and cultural norms. Therefore, social capital functions not only as a community resource but also as a pedagogical mechanism supporting sustainable learning processes ([Putnam, 2000](#)). These findings suggest that nonformal education policies should recognize and support culturally embedded learning systems that already exist within communities. Educational development initiatives should not solely focus on institutional expansion but also consider local knowledge systems and community-based learning practices as valuable educational resources.

Study Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted within a single Indigenous community possessing distinctive socio-cultural characteristics; therefore, the findings should not be generalized directly to other Indigenous contexts. Second, the research primarily focused on family and community interactions and did not examine the influence of external factors such as digital technology, migration, or formal education. Third, the study emphasizes cultural continuity and may not fully capture ongoing social changes within the Baduy community. Future research could undertake comparative studies across different Indigenous communities to explore variations in intergenerational learning and family literacy practices and to examine how local knowledge systems adapt to contemporary social transformations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intergenerational learning constitutes the primary mechanism through which family literacy is constructed and sustained within the Baduy community. Knowledge transmission occurs through culturally embedded practices, including observation, participation, imitation, oral communication, and engagement in everyday community activities, enabling younger generations to acquire not only practical competencies but also the cultural values, norms, and identities necessary for maintaining social continuity. The findings further reveal that family literacy in the Baduy context extends beyond conventional text-based conceptions, encompassing oral traditions, symbolic communication, experiential learning, and participation in culturally organized systems of knowledge. These results contribute to the advancement of educational theory by extending experiential learning and intergenerational learning perspectives, highlighting that learning within Indigenous communities is fundamentally a collective socio-cultural process that supports knowledge transmission, cultural preservation, identity formation, and community sustainability. Moreover, the study expands the conceptualization of family literacy by positioning literacy as a socially and culturally situated practice rather than merely a set of reading and writing skills. From a nonformal education perspective, the findings underscore the strategic role of families and communities as primary sites of lifelong learning and emphasize the importance of recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems as valuable educational resources.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that culturally embedded intergenerational learning serves as a foundational pathway for family literacy development, offering important implications for the design of culturally responsive educational policies, community empowerment initiatives, and sustainable approaches to preserving Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage.

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