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Co-creating Place-Based Learning through Participatory Action Research: Insights from coastal village in West Lombok, Indonesia

By

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Abstract

Place-based learning offers opportunities to link education with local contexts, ecological awareness, and community engagement, yet its integration in coastal education in Indonesia remains limited. This study explores the development of a place-based learning curriculum in Cendi Manik Village, West Lombok, through Participatory Action Research (PAR). The process involved problem identification, action, and reflection, engaging multiple stakeholders including PT Pertamina Patra Niaga Integrated Terminal Ampenan, Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang, Alo Main, and Yayasan Komunitas Penjaga Pulau. Findings highlight that the initiative began as a grassroots community effort to address literacy gaps among coastal children, later evolving into Sekolah Alam Anak Pesisir with the introduction of the “3E Curriculum” (education, ecology, economy). Pertamina’s CSR program played a pivotal role by providing infrastructure, scholarships, and innovative learning media, such as Perta Kid, drone-based environmental education, and creative arts. Children’s perspectives revealed enjoyment of the learning environment, appreciation of supportive teachers, and aspirations for improved school facilities and future careers. The case demonstrates how CSR-community collaboration can enhance grassroots educational initiatives, while also raising questions of sustainability and the need for balancing external support with local ownership. This study contributes to debates on place-based learning and PAR by offering insights into how multi-stakeholder partnerships can foster transformative, context-specific education for marginalized coastal children.

Keywords: 3E Curriculum (Education, Ecology, Economy), children’s perspectives, Corporate Social Responsibility, grassroots initiatives

INTRODUCTION

Place-based learning is often used as an overarching concept to describe educational practices that are rooted in local contexts, shaped by community engagement, or centered on ecological concerns (Yemini et al., 2023). The central aim of place-based learning is to strengthen students’ connection to their surroundings through both humanistic and scientific engagement, with the ultimate goal of advancing the sustainability of local communities and environments (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). Academic benchmarks and standardized assessments, while relevant, are

positioned as secondary considerations within this approach (Ault, 2008). By situating learning within the lived realities of a community, place-based education enables students to link formal knowledge with everyday experiences, thereby enhancing not only cognitive development but also ecological awareness, cultural understanding, and social responsibility (Gruenewald, 2003; Nichols et al., 2016). This orientation is particularly pertinent in coastal regions, where livelihoods depend heavily on ecosystems such as fisheries, mangroves, and coral reefs. Evidence from prior studies indicates that engaging children in locally grounded coastal education not only builds their awareness of challenges like



overexploitation of resources, climate-related risks, and biodiversity decline, but also empowers them to take part in community-driven sustainability efforts (Handayani et al., 2017; Hidayati et al., 2023; Rosyid et al., 2019).

Despite this potential, the integration of place-based learning into coastal education remains limited. Conventional curricula often fail to reflect local contexts, leaving children with little opportunity to engage critically with the challenges and opportunities in their environment. This gap calls for participatory approaches that not only value local knowledge but also include children as active contributors in shaping their learning experiences. Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers a suitable framework to achieve this. By emphasizing collaboration, reflexivity, and action, PAR facilitates the co-creation of knowledge between researchers, communities, and learners (Cornish et al., 2023).

Existing studies on PAR, however, often focus narrowly on participant outcomes and provide only superficial accounts of the processes involved (Fudge et al., 2007). Scholars have highlighted the need for more research that examines PAR from the perspective of all stakeholders and reflects on how it unfolds in practice, including the supports and challenges encountered (Littlechild et al., 2015). Addressing this gap, the present study explores the use of PAR to develop a place-based learning curriculum for children in Cendi Manik Village, Sekotong Subdistrict, West Lombok District, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employed a case study approach in Cendi Manik Village, West Lombok, Indonesia, to design and implement a place-based learning curriculum for children in a coastal village context. We used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the methodological framework. PAR is a collaborative approach in which researchers and participants work together to identify problems, develop actions, and reflect on outcomes (Cornish et al., 2023). Rather than treating participants as subjects, PAR positions them as co-researchers who contribute to shaping both process and results (Vollman et al., 2004). As Wright (2015) notes, PAR connects learning to authentic purposes and real-world consequences, making it a viable approach to teaching and learning. According to (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007), the fundamental procedures of PAR encompass "planning a change with the community; acting and observing the process and consequences; reflecting on their processes and consequences; and further cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting" (p. 335).

PAR was selected because it emphasizes collaboration, reflexivity, and collective problem-solving, making it appropriate for engaging children and community stakeholders in curriculum development. The study followed the cyclical process of PAR—identifying issues, planning, action, observation, and reflection—which allowed participants to be actively involved in both the design and evaluation of the place-based learning curriculum. Stakeholders involved in this research included PT. Pertamina Patra Niaga Integrated Terminal Ampenan ("Pertamina"), *Sanggar Belajar*

Jalan Pulang ("Sanggar"), *Yayasan Komunitas Penjaga Pulau* ("Penjaga Pulau"), and the University of Mataram.

The PAR process in this study followed three iterative stages: (1) **problem identification and planning a change**; (2) **action**, through co-design and trial of a place-based learning curriculum; and (3) **reflection**, involving collective perspectives on challenges and impacts of the curriculum. This cyclical process ensured that the curriculum remained relevant to local needs and adaptable to changing circumstances.

In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews with children to understand their perspectives and experiences of the place-based learning. The interviews explored their motivations for attending, favorite activities, views on teachers and learning, and aspirations for the school's development. These insights provided valuable input into the reflection stage of the PAR process and informed the refinement of the curriculum.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical protocols designed to protect participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants or their legal guardians, with detailed information provided regarding the objectives of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problems Identification and Planning a Change: The Case of Cendi Manik Village

Educational inequality in coastal and rural areas of Indonesia continues to pose significant challenges for children's development. Limited access to schools, inadequate learning facilities, and low household income often constraint opportunities for children to attain quality education. The socio-economic conditions of Madak Belek Hamlet in Cendi Manik Village illustrate the urgency of such initiatives. Most residents rely on fisheries, salt farming, aquaculture, and small-scale trade as their main livelihoods. However, low educational attainment remains a structural challenge. Children in this community often face compounded vulnerabilities: they come from economically disadvantaged households, some grow up in divorced families, and others are left behind by parents working as migrants. These conditions highlight the need for localized, flexible, and inclusive approaches to education.

In response to these conditions, in 2022, the non-profit initiative *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* (the Sanggar) was established in Madak Belek Hamlet, Cendi Manik Village, Sekotong Sub-district, West Lombok District, Indonesia. Located within the Mangrove Ecotourism Area, *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* was created as a response to the educational and social challenges faced by coastal children whose opportunities were constrained by the socio-economic conditions of their families and communities. The establishment of *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* aims to improve the literacy skills of children, while also serving as a space for self-



development and creativity for coastal children. Beyond academic learning, the program seeks to nurture children's and the community's awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability, as well as to strengthen the collective understanding of the vital role education plays in shaping a better future for the people of Madak Belek Hamlet.

The initiative started modestly, with seven to eight children gathering in a local *mushola* (prayer house) as the primary learning venue. With only a marker and tiled wall available for writing, the founders demonstrated a strong commitment to providing a space for children to learn, play, and grow. Over time, the initiative attracted support from local volunteers, including university students, and gradually evolved into an informal but vibrant learning community.

The emergence of *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* reflects broader global trends in alternative education, where local actors initiate grassroots responses to gaps in formal schooling systems (Hossain, 2018). Community-driven learning spaces often arise from the recognition that conventional educational institutions do not always meet the diverse needs of children, particularly in marginalized or resource-poor settings (Rogers et al., 2014). Such initiatives resonate with the concept of place-based learning, which emphasizes the integration of local culture, ecology, and lived experiences into educational practice (Abdillah & Siregar, 2024; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Yemini et al., 2023).

At its early stage, the *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* focused on strengthening basic literacy and numeracy, as many children—even those in upper elementary school—were not yet fluent in reading. Children were grouped by ability levels, enabling facilitators to adopt a more tailored approach. As the children's foundational skills improved, more advanced subjects—such as English—were gradually introduced. This flexible, needs-driven pedagogy illustrates how grassroots community initiatives can align with participatory and context-specific approaches to education, thereby ensuring that learning remains responsive to the realities of marginalized settings (Aziz et al., 2025; Sucipto & Fatihin, 2024). By responding directly to children's immediate learning challenges while drawing on local resources and volunteer networks, *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* demonstrates the transformative potential of grassroots, place-based educational practices.

However, *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* encountered significant challenges, particularly the absence of adequate facilities and the lack of a structured curriculum. In 2024, PT Pertamina Patra Niaga Integrated Terminal Ampenan (Pertamina), through its corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, initiated collaboration with the Sanggar's facilitators to co-develop a teaching and learning curriculum. Pertamina also provided a dedicated building on the edge of the mangrove area, which now functions as both a learning and recreational space for children (Figure 1). Together, they designed the "3E Curriculum," which integrates three pillars—education, ecology, and economy—reflecting a holistic approach to community-based learning that addresses not only literacy but

also environmental stewardship and livelihood awareness.



Figure 1. Learning and Recreational Space for Children provided by Pertamina

Acting: Developing and Implementing Education, Ecology and Economy (3E) Curriculum

To achieve greater structure and sustainability, Pertamina and *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang* agreed to formalize the initiative under the name *Sekolah Alam Anak Pesisir* (Coastal Children's Nature School). Central to this transformation was the development of the "3E Curriculum," which was co-designed by multiple stakeholders, including Pertamina, Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang, Alo Main, University of Mataram and Yayasan Komunitas Penjaga Pulau. The curriculum integrates three pillars—education, ecology, and economy—reflecting a holistic and place-based approach to children's learning in coastal communities (see Figure 2).

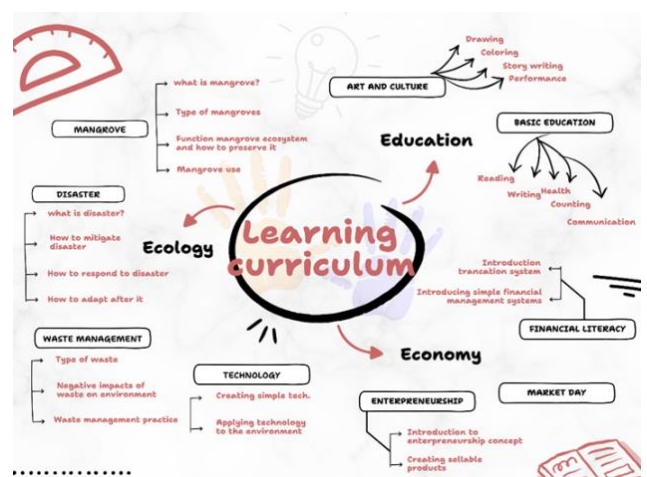


Figure 2. 3E (Education, Ecology, and Economy) Curriculum

Learning was supported by innovative media and activities that combined play, ecological knowledge, and creative expression. Pertamina, in collaboration with Alo Main—a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting traditional games—developed *Perta Kid*, a mangrove-based educational tool that introduces children to ecological concepts through play (Figure 3). Children were also introduced to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) by Penjaga Pulau (Figure 4), enabling them to observe the surrounding environment and understand upstream–downstream linkages (Figure 5). Creative activities such as tote bag painting

were incorporated to enhance self-expression and environmental messaging (Figure 6). Additionally, Pertamina provided scholarships to selected students, further strengthening the educational dimension of the program (Figure 7). As part of the economic pillar of the curriculum, children are introduced to basic concept of ecopreneurships through Market Day (Figure 8).



Figure 3. Children playing Perta-Kid



Figure 4. UAV or drone introduction



Figure 5. Drone view of the surrounding areas



Figure 6. Drawing on tote bags



Figure 7. Scholarships recipients provided by Pertamina



Figure 8. Market Day

The establishment of *Sekolah Alam Anak Pesisir* illustrates how multi-stakeholder collaboration can enrich grassroots initiatives. By co-creating a structured curriculum and providing tangible learning resources, Pertamina's CSR engagement moved beyond material assistance to become an enabler of innovative pedagogies. This resonates with scholarship on CSR in education, which emphasizes the potential for corporate actors to support not only infrastructure but also curriculum development and pedagogical innovation (Jamali & Karam, 2018). Importantly, however, the Sanggar maintained its grassroots orientation, ensuring that the program remained responsive to children's needs and community aspirations.

At the same time, this collaboration raises critical questions regarding long-term sustainability. CSR-supported initiatives often face the risk of dependency, particularly when community

institutions rely heavily on external resources (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2016). While Pertamina's support has strengthened the Sanggar's capacity, the challenge lies in ensuring that the program can continue to thrive beyond the cycle of corporate funding. Sustaining *Sekolah Alam Anak Pesisir* will require not only ongoing partnerships but also the empowerment of local actors to manage, adapt, and eventually institutionalize the program independently. This echoes calls in the literature for balancing external support with local ownership to prevent dependency and to secure durable impacts (Sagebien & Whellams, 2010).

Overall, the case demonstrates the transformative potential of CSR-community partnerships in advancing place-based education for marginalized coastal children, while also underscoring the need for strategies that safeguard community autonomy and long-term resilience.

Reflecting: Children's Perspectives

The interviews with the students highlight several key themes regarding their experiences and aspirations in relation to the alternative school setting.

Enjoyment of Learning Environment

Students consistently expressed that they enjoy attending this school because it is "seru" (fun) and provides opportunities to make friends. They emphasized enjoyment in activities such as drawing, writing, playing together, and engaging with teachers. The presence of supportive teachers who "help when something is difficult" was noted as an important factor in their positive learning experience.

Aspirations for School Improvement

When asked about how they would like the school to be improved, the children envisioned a school that resembles a "big house," with proper classrooms, lockers, and even a multi-storey building. These aspirations reflect their desire for a learning environment that is both structured and modern, while still maintaining a sense of comfort and familiarity. Their responses suggest that while the current school provides emotional and social satisfaction, they also aspire to more formal facilities that signal legitimacy and alignment with conventional schooling.

Relationship with Teachers

The students consistently described their teachers as "seru" (fun) and supportive. They reported liking all their teachers, which reinforces the importance of teacher-student relationships in shaping positive educational experiences. Interestingly, one student mentioned occasionally having disagreements with peers but quickly clarified that overall they "like everyone." This demonstrates both the normalcy of peer conflict and the overarching positive atmosphere.

Learning Experiences and Aspirations

The students shared that they study mathematics, English, puzzles, coloring, and drawing, with some expressing confidence in their ability to count in English "up to ten." Their learning was perceived as neither too difficult nor discouraging, as challenges were met with teacher guidance and correction.

In terms of future aspirations, one student expressed a strong desire to become a teacher, inspired partly by observing their own teachers and by the celebration of Teachers' Day when teachers receive gifts. Another student aspired to be a chef, even humorously noting that they still "burn eggs" when trying to cook. These aspirations reflect both the influence of role models within the school and the intersection of personal interests with future career dreams.

The findings highlight the importance of creating a school environment that is not only academically supportive but also socially and emotionally engaging. The students' preference for learning through play, creativity, and interaction suggests that the alternative school successfully fosters a positive learning climate. At the same time, their aspirations for physical infrastructure improvements (classrooms, lockers, larger school buildings) reflect a desire for legitimacy and alignment with mainstream schooling models.

The role of teachers emerges as particularly significant. Students valued teachers not only as knowledge providers but also as sources of emotional support and role models for their future aspirations. This underscores literature on child-centered and participatory education, which emphasizes the importance of nurturing teacher-student relationships in promoting learning motivation and long-term educational engagement.

Finally, the children's career aspirations, whether to become a teacher or a chef, demonstrate how early experiences, role models, and daily practices shape children's imagination about the future. This suggests that schools like this one, which allow children to feel supported, heard, and inspired, can play a crucial role in shaping both immediate learning outcomes and long-term aspirations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows how *Sanggar Belajar Jalan Pulang*, a grassroots initiative in West Lombok, transformed into a structured program through collaboration with PT Pertamina Patra Niaga Integrated Terminal Ampenan. The creation of the *Sekolah Alam Anak Pesisir* and the co-designed 3E Curriculum (Education, Ecology, Economy) demonstrates how place-based, participatory approaches can strengthen literacy, ecological awareness, and socio-economic sensitivity among coastal children. The case highlights the potential of CSR when it moves beyond donations to sustained co-creation of educational spaces and resources.

The findings are based on a single case, limiting generalizability. Systematic evaluations of learning outcomes and long-term community impacts were not conducted. Future studies should assess the curriculum's effectiveness over time, compare cases across regions, and examine gender dynamics in participation.

Policymakers and practitioners can support community learning spaces as complements to formal schools, especially in underserved areas. CSR programs should be encouraged to engage in long-term partnerships that integrate educational and environmental goals. Scaling the 3E Curriculum will require

collaboration between communities, NGOs, corporations, and government to ensure inclusive and sustainable coastal education.

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