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Early Childhood Maritime Education in Banyuwangi: School Initiative Amid Policy Absence

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan kemaritiman memiliki potensi besar dalam membentuk karakter anak usia dini, terutama di wilayah pesisir. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan implementasi pembelajaran tematik berbasis kemaritiman di TK Cerdas Banyuwangi serta menganalisis kontribusinya terhadap peningkatan literasi budaya anak. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sekolah telah mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai kemaritiman melalui berbagai kegiatan kontekstual, seperti pelepasan tukik, penanaman mangrove, eksplorasi pantai, dan pelestarian tradisi lokal Sego Golong. Pembelajaran juga melibatkan penggunaan *loose parts* dari alam sebagai media edukatif dalam sentra. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun belum ada dukungan kurikulum formal dari pemerintah, inisiatif sekolah dapat menjadi kekuatan utama dalam menanamkan kecintaan terhadap laut, kepedulian lingkungan, dan pemahaman budaya maritim sejak usia dini. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pentingnya dukungan kebijakan dan pelatihan bagi guru untuk memperluas praktik serupa di satuan PAUD lainnya.

ABSTRACT

Maritime education holds significant potential in shaping the character of young children, particularly in coastal areas. This study aims to describe the implementation of thematic maritime-based learning at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi and to analyze its contribution to enhancing children's cultural literacy. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the school has integrated maritime values through various contextual activities such as turtle releases, mangrove planting, beach exploration, and the preservation of local traditions like Sego Golong. The learning process also involves the use of natural loose parts as educational materials within classroom learning centers. These results show that even in the absence of formal curricular support from the government, school-level initiatives can serve as a key driver in fostering love for the sea, environmental awareness, and maritime cultural identity from an early age. This study recommends the development of supportive policies and teacher training to expand similar practices across early childhood education institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Maritime education plays a strategic role in fostering awareness among younger generations about their potential and responsibilities as a maritime nation (Kitada, 2022). Several studies have shown that a maritime-based education approach can instill a sense of patriotism, environmental awareness, and understanding of marine resources as essential to the livelihoods of coastal communities (Amir, 2024; Marlina et.al., 2023). This commitment is tangibly reflected in certain regions of Indonesia for example, the Riau Islands Provincial Government has mandated the integration of local maritime culture and knowledge into the school curriculum through Local Content (Muatan Lokal) (Alverdian, 2024; Susilana & Hernawan, 2018), recognizing the strategic importance of nurturing generations connected to their archipelago identity (Alverdian, 2024). Lestari, et.al., (2022) emphasize that implementing a maritime-oriented curriculum in early childhood education can develop naturalistic intelligence and shape environmentally conscious character. Similarly, Zhong & White, (2017) found that learning activities involving ocean exploration can improve children's cognitive, social, and motor skills.

Despite Indonesia's vast maritime potential, many coastal areas have yet to adopt a contextual maritime-based curriculum (Nuryati & Mwila, 2025). In most schools, especially in coastal regions, learning tends to remain general, lacking content that instills a strong connection to the sea as part of the community's cultural and economic life (Lestari et. al., 2022; Rohmah & Aulina, 2024). As a result, students often view the ocean merely as a tourist attraction rather than as a living space with economic, social, and cultural value.

This lack of attention poses a critical problem, as a generation disconnected from their maritime heritage will be unprepared to sustainably manage or capitalize on Indonesia's vast ocean resources (Alverdian, 2024). Specifically, the predominant focus in existing literature has been on curriculum design or policy analysis, neglecting the crucial aspect of how the lack of practical maritime education translates into tangible behavioral and perceptual outcomes among students and the wider community (Alverdian, 2024; Sarilah, 2022). Furthermore, the limited research that does exist often fails to provide a comprehensive framework for how these negative impacts can be reversed through effective, contextualized teaching models. Therefore, this study is essential not only to document these specific impacts but also to propose a model that bridges the gap between educational practice and national maritime goals.

Banyuwangi, a coastal district in East Java, stands out as one of the few regions actively integrating maritime education into school curricula. Geographically bordered by the Bali Strait and the Indian Ocean, Banyuwangi has significant marine potential (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Banyuwangi, 2020; BPS Jawa Timur, 2021). Several schools have begun adopting thematic learning based on maritime topics, including the introduction of marine environments, the use of fishery products, and basic coastal conservation activities. These efforts aim to foster maritime awareness and cultural literacy from an early age.

Local traditions in Banyuwangi also provide rich learning resources for maritime education (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Banyuwangi, 2020). One of the most well-known traditions is Petik Laut, an annual ritual performed by fishing communities as an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty and a prayer for safety at sea (Kartikasari et al., 2024). This ceremony is not merely a symbolic event; it conveys educational values such as respect for nature, community solidarity, and spiritual awareness in maintaining marine ecosystem balance (Setiyani et. al., 2021). These forms of local wisdom help children understand that the sea is not just a source of livelihood, but an integral part of their social and cultural identity (Kartikasari et. al., 2024). In addition, environmental preservation efforts such as mangrove planting and coastal clean-up programs led by the local community offer schools concrete ways to cultivate students' environmental responsibility. These

activities demonstrate a harmonious relationship between humans and the ocean and serve as effective learning experiences for nurturing maritime cultural literacy in early childhood. Children learn to appreciate nature, recognize their coastal identity, and develop a sense of belonging to their environment.

A notable example of this approach can be seen at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi, an early childhood education institution that adapts its curriculum to suit the region's geographic and social context. On September 14, 2024, the school organized a Market Day activity themed "PAUD Cerdas Fish Product Market," where children acted as buyers and sellers, explored various marine products, and practiced simple transactions. This activity was designed to help children understand the livelihoods of coastal communities while instilling values of cooperation and social responsibility.

The day before, on September 13, 2024, an outdoor learning session took place along a nearby beach, where students explored the coastal environment with guidance from teachers and parents. Observations showed high levels of enthusiasm among the children, indicating that such nature-based learning activities effectively stimulate cognitive, social, and naturalistic development. The school principal also noted that these activities will continue through follow-up programs such as mangrove planting, beach cleanups, and turtle release events efforts aligned with building a sustainable and contextual maritime education model.

This research is significant as it presents a case study of TK Cerdas Banyuwangi, a school that has implemented thematic learning based on maritime education. Prior to implementation, observations revealed that most students were unfamiliar with the marine potential around them and lacked awareness of their coastal environment. Through this thematic approach, the study aims to describe the implementation of maritime-based learning and analyze its impact on improving cultural literacy among early childhood students in Banyuwangi's coastal communities.

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, based on the framework of Robert K. Yin (Yin, 2018). This approach was chosen as it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the maritime-themed learning implemented at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi within the real-life context of coastal students. According to Yin (2018), a case study is used when the researcher aims to answer "how" and "why" questions related to complex phenomena that involve many contextual factors. The subjects of this study are Class A and B teachers, as well as students at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi, Banyuwangi Regency, who have implemented maritime-based learning. Data were collected using three main techniques: direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine learning activities that incorporate maritime elements. Interviews were carried out with teachers and the school principal to explore their understanding of the maritime curriculum and the challenges they face in its implementation. Documentation, including photos, videos, and activity notes, was used to support and strengthen the data obtained through observation and interviews.

To address the quality tests required for rigorous case study research, specifically Construct Validity and Reliability (Yin, 2018), several verification techniques were employed. First, triangulation was used by systematically comparing and correlating data gathered from different sources: observations of classroom activities, transcripts from student and teacher interviews, and documentation such as local curriculum syllabi. This helped confirm the consistency and reliability of the empirical findings regarding the implementation of maritime education. Second, member checking was performed member checking was performed by sending summarized interview transcripts and key preliminary findings back to the main participants (teachers and community leaders) for verification of

accuracy and interpretation, ensuring that the researcher's understanding aligned with the participants' perspectives. Finally, the researcher maintained an audit trail by keeping detailed records of all research procedures, data collection, and analytical decisions, thereby enhancing the study's reliability and confirmability.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The findings of this study show that TK Cerdas Banyuwangi has made various efforts to integrate maritime-based education into its early childhood learning program. Although there is no direct support or standardized curriculum from the local government, the school has taken the initiative to develop learning that is contextual and relevant to the lives of coastal communities. The school's vision and mission align strongly with maritime education values, particularly regarding environmental awareness, preservation of local culture, and character building from an early age.

School Vision and Mission Supporting Maritime Education



Figure 1. Students visiting the traditional fish market, learning about the sea as a source of life and the local economy

TK Cerdas Banyuwangi has a vision and mission that aligns with the values of maritime education, especially in terms of environmental preservation and early introduction to coastal culture. The school believes that education is not only about academic skills but also about shaping character and fostering care for the surrounding environment. This was emphasized by the principal, who stated, "We want children to grow up knowing the sea—not just as a place for recreation or tourism, but as part of their life and culture. So from an early age, we introduce them to activities related to the sea." This statement reflects that maritime awareness is part of the school's long-term orientation, even though its implementation is still limited to certain activities.

Learning Model Using Daily Rotating Centers



Figure 2. Students engaging with loose parts (natural or found materials) in a learning center, stimulating creativity and motor skills through exploration of textures and objects.

TK Cerdas uses a variety of learning centers that rotate daily, including preparation, art, and language centers. This model encourages children to engage in different types of learning activities. Thursdays are devoted to outdoor learning, and Fridays to spiritual development. Although maritime themes are not explicitly included in every center, this flexible structure allows for the integration of marine topics through thematic units. One teacher shared, “On Thursdays, we do outdoor activities, like traditional games or going to the beach if the weather is good. Sometimes we link it to sea themes, but not regularly. It depends on the theme of the month.” Interestingly, in several learning centers, teachers also use loose parts sourced from the coast, such as sea stones, sand, and seashells collected from nearby beaches. These natural materials are used as tools for exploration, art, and even early math activities, stimulating children's creativity and motor skills while introducing them to the textures and characteristics of marine objects. This practice shows that while the learning structure already supports a contextual approach, the integration of maritime education is not yet consistent or comprehensive.

Turtle Release Activity as Environmental Education



Figure 3. Students participating in the turtle release activity as part of the school's partnership with a marine conservation organization, fostering empathy for marine wildlife

The school partners with a marine conservation organization to carry out a turtle release activity every three months. Children are invited to the beach to watch and participate in releasing baby turtles into the sea. However, they are not involved in the incubation or care process. Still, children are introduced to the tools used and the hatching process in a simplified manner. One teacher explained, “The children only take part in the release because the hatching process is more complex and not safe for them. But we still show them the tools and tell them how the process works so they understand and care.” This activity aims to foster empathy and a sense of responsibility for marine wildlife, even though student involvement is limited to the final stage of the conservation process.

Mangrove Planting Activity with Limited Engagement



Figure 4. Students participating in the mangrove planting activity on the shoreline as a practical lesson on coastal conservation

Children are also involved in a mangrove planting activity on the shoreline, in collaboration with a non-governmental environmental organization. In this activity, students participate directly in planting mangroves, but they are not involved in caring for or monitoring the growth of the plants. At the end of the academic year, the children are taken back to the site to see the results. One teacher stated, "We let them plant directly so they understand the importance of protecting the beach. But we don't involve them in maintaining the plants due to limited time and resources. So, at the end of the year, we bring them back to see the trees they planted." Although their involvement is symbolic, the activity still provides meaningful learning experiences and helps children understand the importance of coastal conservation.

Preserving Local Culture Through the Sego Golong Tradition



Figure 5. Students in traditional Osing attire are preparing to enjoy Sego Golong as an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty and cultural learning.

One form of integrating maritime values and local culture at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi is through the Sego Golong tradition, a ritual unique to the Osing ethnic group. This activity is carried out as an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty and a way to introduce children to ancestral heritage and national values. Children are actively involved in preparing and enjoying traditional foods such as rice with boiled eggs, sayur kelor (moringa soup), and red-and-white jenang (rice porridge), followed by a collective prayer. These foods have symbolic meanings: the red and white jenang represent the Indonesian flag—courage and purity. Locally, sayur kelor and red jenang are also believed to have spiritual power as protectors from negative energy or illness. The tradition is also followed by a beach-cleaning activity as a direct act of environmental stewardship. One teacher shared, "Sego Golong is part of Osing culture, and we want the children to understand this tradition and its meaning. It's not just about food, but about gratitude, togetherness, and protecting the sea. We also take them to clean the beach afterward." Through this activity, the school effectively combines local culture, spirituality, and environmental education into a rich, meaningful learning experience.

Lack of Government Support



Figure 6. Students observing the Intan Box (Sandless Turtle Egg Hatching Box) facility, provided through a partnership with non-governmental organizations to support maritime-based learning

Despite the school's proactive efforts to implement maritime-based learning, there is no consistent support in the form of curriculum or training from the local government. Past training programs were ceremonial in nature and had little impact on classroom implementation. Teachers have had to seek out resources independently and build partnerships with environmental organizations to supplement the learning process. "There's no clear direction from the government on maritime education in early childhood. We just figure things out on our own—sometimes we join events from environmental communities," said one teacher. This condition highlights that the development of maritime education is still heavily dependent on the initiative of individual schools and support from non-governmental partners, rather than a structured and sustained system.

Environmental Education Through Beach Clean-Up Activities



Figure 7. Students participating in the monthly beach clean-up and environmental education activity

As part of its character and environmental education program, TK Cerdas Banyuwangi holds a monthly beach clean-up activity. Children are invited to collect litter and learn to distinguish between organic and inorganic waste. Aside from being a fun physical activity, this also instills early environmental awareness. A parent commented, "We're happy the kids go to the beach not just to play, but to learn how to throw trash properly. At home, they've become more aware when they see garbage." This activity reflects that the school's concern extends beyond academic achievement to include the development of social responsibility and care for the environment. Results are the main part of a scientific article which contains research results and results of hypothesis testing.

3.2 Discussion

This study reveals that maritime education at TK Cerdas Banyuwangi is implemented through a contextual approach rooted in the local environment and cultural traditions.

Despite the absence of formal structural support, the school has successfully designed various thematic learning strategies that incorporate maritime values, both explicitly and symbolically. These findings align with Yin's case study framework, particularly through pattern matching and explanation building, by comparing empirical data with theoretical frameworks and previous studies.

School Initiatives as Drivers of Contextual Education

The lack of an official curriculum has not hindered the school from independently developing thematic maritime programs. This reflects the critical role of local actors in initiating context-based education. Fatmi & Fauzan (2022), Rosyida, Pamungkas, & Muthmainah (2025), Syakuro & Apriliana (2023) emphasized that school-level initiatives are key to successfully developing curricula grounded in local potential. This is supported by Ifani (2020), dan Mimin (2023), who asserted that schools with adaptive leadership tend to be more innovative in crafting contextual learning approaches. Likewise, Abubakar, Ade, & Uke (2021), Susilo & Irwansyah (2019) highlighted that community participation and local partnerships are vital in delivering education rooted in culture and environment.

Integrating the Natural Environment into Learning Centers

The use of loose parts such as sea stones, sand, and shells collected from nearby beaches is a tangible form of integrating the local environment into learning centers. According to Ayu Raniah & Rahmawati (2023) Natural materials stimulate imagination and creativity in early childhood. Similarly, Song & Zhang (2024), Yi1, Asyik, Al-hosaini (2024) noted that local environmental media provide essential sensory experiences that support children's cognitive and fine motor development. In addition, Kamisykatin & Sobarna (2022) found that learning with natural materials strengthens children's emotional connection to nature, thereby laying a foundation for environmental awareness.

Field-Based Activities as a Means of Ecological Literacy

Activities such as turtle releases and mangrove planting provide direct experiences that foster naturalistic intelligence in children. Garner & Shonkoff (2012), Pirchio, Passiatore, Panno (2021) showed that early childhood involvement in conservation activities positively affects ecological empathy and pro-environmental behavior. Likewise, Jaya (2025), Wen (2022) demonstrated that outdoor learning focused on maritime themes significantly enhances children's understanding of coastal ecosystems. Although children's involvement is still largely symbolic, these practices remain a crucial step in building early environmental literacy.

Local Wisdom in Shaping Maritime Cultural Identity

The integration of the Sego Golong tradition into classroom activities serves as a culturally rich medium for learning, encompassing symbolic elements of nationalism and marine conservation. Rosyida, Pamungkas & Muthmainah (2025), Susilo & Irwansyah (2019) asserted that culture-based learning strengthens children's identity and collective awareness of their social and ecological surroundings. Nabilah, Sarmini & Yani (2024) likewise observed that incorporating local traditions in education fosters meaningful and contextual learning experiences. Pikner, Piwowarczyk & Ruskule (2022), Zhong & White (2017) further emphasized that maritime-based cultural heritage can be used to instill character and patriotism in children from an early age.

Limited Structural Support for Maritime Education in Early Childhood

The absence of structured training, thematic curriculum, or governmental support remains a significant challenge. The Ministry of Education and Culture acknowledged that local wisdom-based education at the early childhood level has not yet been adequately regulated (Kemendikbud, 2019). Lestari, Gindis & Ageyev (2022) also highlighted that the lack of thematic training for teachers is a barrier to implementing maritime-based education. Moreover, Susilo & Irwansyah (2019) noted that without concrete policy interventions,

context-based education will continue to depend heavily on local initiatives, which may not always be sustainable.

Overall, this study affirms that maritime education at the early childhood level can be implemented contextually through school-level initiatives, particularly in coastal regions rich in natural and cultural resources. The integration of environment- and culture-based activities not only enriches children's learning experiences but also fosters a sense of love for the sea and identification as part of a maritime nation. The findings suggest that early childhood education holds significant potential for developing cultural literacy and ecological awareness from an early age, echoing the theoretical perspectives of Gardner (1993, dalam (Marenus, 2023) dan Sobel (2004, dalam (Sobel, 2024)) on experiential and nature-based learning. Practically, this study implies the need for policy support and thematic curricula to enable other schools to adopt similar approaches sustainably. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on localized education and case-based learning in fostering cultural literacy in early learners. However, this study is limited by its single-case focus, preventing the generalization of findings, and it does not include a systematic quantitative evaluation of learning outcomes on children's development. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the context by involving more educational institutions and to apply a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more comprehensive and measurable understanding of the impact of these activities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that maritime education at the early childhood level can be implemented contextually through approaches grounded in the local environment and cultural traditions. TK Cerdas Banyuwangi has shown that school-level initiatives are capable of delivering meaningful thematic maritime learning, even in the absence of formal curriculum or government policy support. Various activities, such as turtle releases, mangrove planting, beach exploration, the use of natural loose parts, and the preservation of local traditions like Sego Golong, serve as concrete efforts to instill values of love for the sea, environmental awareness, and maritime cultural identity from an early age. These findings reinforce the importance of early childhood education as a foundation for developing cultural literacy and ecological character, particularly in coastal communities. The implication of this research is the need for developing a thematic maritime curriculum at the early childhood level, supported by formal policies, teacher training, and cross-sector collaboration.

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