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Rivers, Rice Fields and Rural Identity: A Photovoice Documentation Project with Junior High School Students in Kecamatan Gading, Probolinggo

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Abstract: This article examines the visual documentation of rural landscapes produced by junior high school students in Kecamatan Gading, Probolinggo, Indonesia, as part of a community-based *pengabdian masyarakat* (community service) program. Drawing on 117 field photographs, the study analyzes how students visually frame three key elements of their environment: rivers, rice fields, and tobacco plots. Using *Pandalungan* cultural hybridity and Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL) as theoretical lenses, the analysis reveals that students position themselves as observers at the edge of the landscape, document the environment as a layered space of nature and infrastructure, and visually normalize agricultural labor. These findings indicate that photovoice serves as a pedagogical tool that supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by linking environmental observation with language learning. This article contributes to the literature on visual methods and place-based education by demonstrating how rural youth act as active interpreters of their own agrarian environments.

Keywords: *Eco-Cultural Language Learning; Pandalungan; Photovoice; Visual Documentation; Quality Education.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rural landscapes are rarely passive geographic settings. This region functions as a dynamic and living ecosystem, where natural geography, human daily routines, and the agricultural economy intersect (Riyanto et al., 2024). In many developing regions, communities have deep-rooted physical and cultural ties to their surrounding environment; they integrate various natural markers, waters, and agricultural land into everyday social order (Chauhan, 2020; Murzyn-Kupisz & Dzialek, 2013). Understanding how residents interact with these spaces provides fundamental insights into human geography, ecological balance, and regional sustainability. In addition, the visual and physical configuration of rural landscapes often reflects socio-cultural values passed down from generation to generation, which in turn form the basis of the community's identity.

In regions such as Kecamatan Gading in Probolinggo Regency, East Java, these living spaces encompass a mosaic of river streams, terraced wet-rice fields, and smallholder plantations. The area is home to distinctive local potentials—the Kali Kembar river destination, smallholder coffee gardens, and areca palm (*pinang*) groves whose fruit is traded as far as Papua. It also sits within the *Pandalungan* cultural region, where Madurese and Javanese traditions have blended since the colonial plantation era (Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Airlangga, 2026). This interplay between people and environment forms an essential component of intangible cultural heritage and localized spatial identity, reflecting centuries of adaptation to highland and agrarian geographies (Riyanto et al., 2024).

However, modernization and commercial pressures increasingly threaten the continuity of traditional rural life. When agricultural lands and natural water spaces undergo unmanaged transformation, communities risk losing not only their economic foundations but also the familiar routes, gathering places, and shared memories that anchor collective belonging (Febriani & Riyanto, 2021). In Kecamatan Gading, these pressures intersect with an educational challenge: many families increasingly choose religious boarding schools (*pesantren*) over formal secondary education, threatening the sustainability of local schooling and the intergenerational transmission of environmental and cultural knowledge (Singgih et al., 2020; Sani, 2020).

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Despite growing academic interest in community development and the preservation of cultural heritage, a critical gap remains regarding how rural communities visually express their localized interactions. While institutional frameworks often record regional statistics or compile lists of tourism destinations, few studies examine how visual-based methodologies can capture the intimate, everyday experiences of rural residents within specific geographical contexts (Wang & Burris, 1997; Carr et al., 2021). Consequently, the visual perspectives and lived experiences of rural residents are frequently overlooked in both development planning and policy.

This article responds to that gap through a community-based visual documentation project conducted at SMPN 2 Gading between May and October 2026 as part of a university *pengabdian masyarakat* (community service) program organized by the Research Group on Classical, Religious, and Local Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga. Preparatory fieldwork began on 27 May 2026, culminating in a photovoice workshop on 10 October 2026 (Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Airlangga, 2026). The program engaged students in producing field photographs documenting three key elements of their rural environment: rivers, rice fields, and tobacco plots. Designed around Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL)—an approach integrating environmental content, ecological literacy, and cultural identity into language education (Nur et al., 2022; Tatin et al., 2024; Tjendani et al., 2019)—the activity supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 1 (No Poverty) through place-based learning. Guided by two research questions—*"Which places in their rural environment do residents remember, and what happened there that made them important?"* and *"How do visual representations of agricultural fields and local commodities reflect the broader socio-economic and cultural realities of rural life?"*—this article presents the photographs as primary data and demonstrates how visual documentation captures the intersection of community life, natural resources, and regional sustainability.

II. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section establishes the theoretical framework and reviews the literature grounding the visual analysis of rural landscapes in Kecamatan Gading. First, it introduces *Pandalungan* cultural hybridity to situate the community within its regional socio-cultural context. Second, it details Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL) and its ecolinguistic foundations as the pedagogical framework guiding the program. Finally, it synthesizes recent empirical studies, highlighting key debates and identifying the gap addressed by this study.

➢ *Pandalungan Cultural Hybridity*

Kecamatan Gading sits within the *Pandalungan* cultural region, a zone spanning the *Tapal Kuda* ("Horseshoe") area of eastern Java where Javanese and Madurese cultural traditions have interacted for centuries. The term derives from *dhalung*, a large cooking pot into which various ingredients are placed—a metaphor for a meeting place of diverse cultural streams (Sutarto, 2004). Historically, large numbers of Madurese were brought to this region as plantation laborers during the Dutch colonial period, producing a distinctive cultural hybridity that persists today in language use, religious practice, and social organization (Akhiyat & Fadlillah, 2023). Madurese remains the everyday language of many communities in the area, coexisting with Indonesian in formal education and public life.

This hybridity has significant implications for education. Scholars describe Pandalungan communities as characterized by cultural heterogeneity that generates both resilience and potential tension, requiring curricula and pedagogies responsive to students' lived realities (Hosnan et al., 2024). Widiyawati (2019) emphasizes that Pandalungan communities are fundamentally agrarian, socially interdependent, and open to change, with communal traditions and shared spaces playing a dominant role in daily life. When educational materials ignore local cultural and linguistic contexts, students may feel disconnected from formal schooling—particularly in communities where alternative institutions such as *pesantren* offer more culturally familiar environments (Rafii et al., 2023). Understanding this regional identity is therefore essential for any educational intervention in Gading, including the visual documentation program examined in this article. By engaging students with their own landscape as a learning resource, the program positions local culture not as an obstacle to education but as its foundation.

➢ *Eco-Cultural Language Learning and Ecolinguistics*

Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL) integrates environmental content, ecological literacy, and cultural identity into language education. This approach aligns language instruction with environmental education, ecolinguistics, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to develop language proficiency while fostering knowledge, attitudes, and practices that are environmentally responsible (Nur et al., 2022; Tatin et al., 2024). ECLL positions language not merely as a tool for communication, but as a means for engaging with knowledge, values, and actions related to the environment.

This pedagogical orientation is rooted in ecolinguistics, which views language as embedded within a socio-ecological system and as a means for understanding and advocating for the environment (Tjendani et al., 2019). From an ecolinguistic perspective, the vocabulary, narratives, and forms of expression available to a community shape how its members perceive and interact with their environment. As students learn to describe local rivers, rice fields, or tobacco farms in their own words, they simultaneously develop language skills while articulating ecological relationships.

In practice, ECLL fosters learning that is meaningful, reflective, and enjoyable—principles aligned with a "deep learning" approach, which prioritizes contextual relevance over rote memorization. For students in rural areas, whose daily lives are closely tied to agricultural cycles and the natural landscape, environment-based content serves as a

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bridge between the formal curriculum and their own lived experiences. This framework forms the core of the program, in which students photograph and document various elements of their surroundings as part of an integrated set of activities that encompass both literacy and environmental awareness.

➢ *Literature Review and Research Gap*

Recent scholarship has increasingly employed visual and narrative methodologies to investigate local identity and environmental relationships. Wang et al. (2025) showed how community-led visual documentation maps rural ecological assets and enhances public participation in spatial planning within traditional village settlements. Alencar et al. (2025) highlighted digital visual storytelling as a means for rural communities to articulate environmental stewardship across changing landscapes.

Within Indonesia, prior community service work by the present research team has developed a methodological lineage connecting visual documentation to cultural identity and education. These include photo-narrative projects with children in Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya (Riyanto & Adiyani, 2024), self-narrative and identity work with Tengger youth in Tosari (Riyanto et al., 2024), and heritage promotion through photo-narrative and song by vocational students in Trowulan (Lutfi et al., 2025). Together, these projects demonstrate that visual methods can be adapted across diverse Indonesian settings—urban heritage, indigenous highland, and tourism contexts alike.

Despite these contributions, a clear gap remains. Existing studies largely focus on urban heritage, established tourist destinations, or indigenous communities under the pressure of modernization; few examine rural communities within agrarian landscapes that are experiencing both emerging tourism and a decline in educational participation. Furthermore, visual documentation is rarely linked to formal pedagogical frameworks—such as those concerning education and learning—within these contexts. This study addresses this gap by analyzing visual documentation produced by junior high school students in Gading District, mapping how rural residents encode collective memory and environmental relationships through imagery, and demonstrating how such documentation can support quality education in underserved rural communities.

III. METHOD

This section describes the research design, participants, site, and procedures of the community-based visual documentation project. Because the study was conducted as part of a university *pengabdian masyarakat* (community service) program, the method combines participatory visual research with educational practice.

➢ *Research Design*

This study employs a qualitative, participatory visual design centered on the photovoice method. Photovoice is a community-based approach in which participants photograph their own environments, reflect upon these images, and document the meanings embedded within them (Wang & Burris, 1997). Rather than treating photographs merely as illustrations, this method positions them as primary data that capture how participants perceive, evaluate, and interact with their surrounding environments.

The design followed the five standard photovoice stages adapted from the program proposal (Ekwonye et al., 2023):

Table 1 Photovoice Stages Implemented in the Program

Stage	Activity	Implementation in Gading
1	Planning and training	Workshop on photography ethics, techniques, and consent
2	Photography and data collection	Students photographed self-selected natural and cultural objects
3	Group discussion	Classroom discussion of selected photographs
4	Individual reflection	Students wrote self-narratives based on their chosen photographs
5	Sharing outputs	Workshop for selected photographs and narratives

The program also integrated Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL) as its pedagogical frame, meaning that the photographic activity was explicitly linked to language learning outcomes—specifically, students' ability to describe and reflect on their local environment in written form.

➢ *Research Site*

The project was conducted in Kecamatan Gading, Probolinggo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, a highland area on the slopes of the Argopuro mountain complex. The district sits within the *Pandalungan* cultural region, where Madurese and Javanese traditions have historically blended (Sutarto, 2004; Akhiyat & Fadlillah, 2023).

The partner institution was SMPN 2 Gading, a public junior high school located on Jalan Raya Kertosono, Desa Kertosono, approximately 150 km from Universitas Airlangga's Campus B in Surabaya. The school has 11 teachers, six classrooms, and one class per grade level.

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Table 2 School Profile at Time of Program

Category	Detail
Total students	63
Male students	41
Female students	22
Grade 7	18 students
Grade 8	25 students
Grade 9	20 students
Teachers	11
Classrooms available	6
Classrooms in use	3
Primary language	Madurese, Javanese (with Indonesian in instruction)

Two characteristics of this school context are relevant to the study. First, the school operates with its classrooms only about half-filled, reflecting a broader decline in student enrollment at the formal secondary education level, as described in the Introduction. Second, the majority of students come from households with the lowest income levels—a factor that influences both their access to education and the role that local agriculture plays in their family lives.

➢ *Participants*

Participants were junior high school students from Grades 7, 8, and 9 at SMPN 2 Gading. The program was conducted with the three existing classes at the school, corresponding to the institution's entire grade-level structure.

Table 3 Distribution of Photographs by Grade Level

Grade	Students submitting photographs	Photograph documented	Dominant themes
7	14	38	Rivers, rice fields, mixed gardens, hills, tobacco, roads
8	22	58	Rice fields, rivers, school environment, gardens, hills, dams, beach
9	7	21	Rice fields, gardens, water channels, dry land, hills, corn, sluice gate
Total	43	117	—

The table reflects photographs that were formally catalogued and tabulated as project data. The broader program engaged the school community across all three grades. For this article, analysis focuses on photographs depicting rivers, rice fields, and tobacco plots, which together account for the majority of the catalogued images.

➢ *Procedure*

The project ran from 27 May to 10 October 2026, with an extended preparation period preceding the culminating workshop.

- *Preparation* (May–September 2026): Coordination began on 27 May 2026 with the village facilitator, followed by meetings with SMPN 2 Gading's vice principal and teaching staff to establish the scope of collaboration and schedule activities. During this phase, the team identified local environmental and cultural assets suitable for documentation, including the Kali Kembar river area and smallholder agricultural plots in the surrounding highlands.
- Workshop (10 October 2026). The main workshop was held on Saturday, 10 October 2026, at SMPN 2 Gading. Facilitators from Universitas Airlangga delivered materials across the three grade levels on local environmental and cultural heritage, ECLL principles, photovoice techniques, and creative writing. Students received two writing scaffolds: the 5W+1H framework for content and the narrative arc of orientation → complication → resolution → reorientation for structure.

➢ *Data and Analysis*

The primary data for this article are the catalogued photographs and their associated field descriptions. Each photograph was documented with metadata including photographer (anonymized by grade level), subject matter, environmental elements shown, and descriptive notes. Analysis proceeded in three steps:

- Categorization: Photographs were grouped into recurring themes based on subject matter and environmental elements. For this article, analysis focuses on three themes: river, rice field, and tobacco plot.
- Visual content analysis: Each theme was examined for recurring visual motifs—for example, the prominence of rocky riverbeds, terraced rice fields at different growth stages, or the framing of tobacco plants.
- Thematic interpretation: Findings were interpreted in relation to the two theoretical frameworks: *Pandalungan* cultural identity and Eco-Cultural Language Learning, supported by the relevant literature.

Because the article focuses on visual data, the analysis is descriptive and interpretive rather than statistical. Quantitative tabulations (as in Table 3) are used to indicate coverage, not to claim representativeness.

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the visual findings from the community-based documentation project conducted at SMPN 2 Gading and discusses them in relation to the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study: *Pandalungan* cultural hybridity and Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL). The analysis draws on 117 field photographs produced by students across Grades 7, 8, and 9, which collectively document three key elements of their rural environment: the river, the rice field, and tobacco plots. Each of the following sections examines one of these themes by identifying recurring visual motifs and interpreting them through the dual lens of cultural identity and environmental pedagogy. The photographs are treated not as illustrations but as primary data—visual statements through which students articulate what they notice, value, and recognize as part of their everyday landscape. Taken together, the five sections reveal how rural students in Kecamatan Gading visually frame their environment, and what these framings suggest about the intersection of local culture, agrarian life, and place-based education.

➢ *The River*

Among the three themes analyzed in this article, rivers account for the largest number of photographs. Images of water appear across all three grade levels and comprise approximately one-quarter of the documented collection. This frequency alone underscores the significance of rivers in how students perceive and value their surrounding environment.

These photographs of rivers share a consistent visual vocabulary. Students most often position themselves at the water's edge—standing on rocks, crouching beside the current, or pointing toward the flow—rather than entering the water itself. The environment is dominated by three recurring elements: a rocky riverbed with clear, shallow water; steep earthen or rocky banks; and surrounding vegetation, particularly bamboo, palms, and dense riverside plants. A small number of the other photographs feature human-made elements: small dams, concrete embankments, bamboo footbridges, and sluice gates equipped with blue-and-yellow-painted operating wheels.

Table 4 River-Related Photographs by Recurring Motif

Motif	Description	Approximate count
Rocky riverbed with clear water	Shallow streams, boulders, gravel, visible current	16
Waterfall or small dam	Falling water, concrete or stone barriers	8
Bridge or embankment	Bamboo footbridges, concrete walls, sluice gates	4
River recreation	Swimming, tubing, groups in the water	3
Total	**~31**	

The table indicates approximate counts, since several photographs combine more than one motif. What is consistent across the set is the student's position relative to the water: in nearly every image, the photographer stands at a distance, framing the river rather than being immersed in it. One photograph shows children swimming in the background while the student remains on shore—a small but telling composition.



Fig 1 A Student Sits at the Edge of a Rocky River

The river emerges as a shared communal space. Unlike agricultural land, which is divided into plots and inherited, rivers in Pandalungan villages are not privately owned. They belong to everyone and no one. This communal character reflects a broader feature of Pandalungan society. Widiyawati (2019) describes Pandalungan communities as fundamentally agrarian, traditional, and socially interdependent, with communal traditions and shared spaces playing a dominant role in daily life. The river fits this pattern precisely: it is a resource that no single household controls, yet one that all households depend on.

The egalitarian character of this shared space aligns with Ilham's (2022) observation that Pandalungan society is not structured around the dominance of any single ethnic group. Instead, Javanese and Madurese traditions hold a relatively balanced standing, fostering a pluralistic cultural space where shared resources are negotiated rather than controlled by one party. The river—not owned by any single household—reflects this broader pattern. The students' choice to repeatedly photograph the river—rather than, for instance, family-owned land—suggests they perceive the river as a landscape element with collective significance, rather than merely as private property.

The presence of infrastructure, such as sluice gates and embankments, further underscores that the river is managed, shared, and utilized by the broader community. This is consistent with community-based river management models documented in various rural regions across Indonesia, where

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local wisdom and collective decision-making govern water usage and conservation (Permatasari et al., 2024). Widiyawati (2019) notes that Pandalungan society is open to change and highly adaptive; they incorporate new technologies and infrastructure without abandoning traditional practices. The photographs of the river capture this duality: a natural waterway that has simultaneously become a managed and engineered environment.

Through the ECLL lens, the river represents the kind of concrete, place-based subject matter the framework advocates. Rivers offer rich descriptive vocabulary: terms for water clarity, current, depth, rock formations, and seasonal change. When students selected river sites for documentation, they were not choosing arbitrary subjects—they were choosing environments they could describe from experience. Research on river ecosystem services in Indonesian communities confirms that rivers are perceived through multiple lenses—as sources of irrigation, fish, recreation, and cultural value (Nurani et al., 2024). This multiplicity is precisely what makes the river an effective ECLL subject: it allows students to practice language that describes both natural features and human uses. The visual data show that these environments are familiar enough to be photographed repeatedly but distinctive enough to be worth framing.

The river photographs suggest that this water landscape functions simultaneously as a cultural heritage and pedagogical resource. The students did not photograph the river as an abstract "water resource" or a distant tourist destination, but as a familiar place—one they could approach, observe, and present. This dual character aligns with both theoretical frames: the river is Pandalungan in its communal use, and ECLL-appropriate in its capacity to anchor language and observation.

One further observation deserves note. Several photographs include small waterfalls, dams, or sluice gates—features that mark the river as a managed environment, not a wild one. This complicates any romantic reading of rural water. The river in Gading is not untouched by nature; it is a working landscape, shaped by irrigation needs, community maintenance, and occasional recreational use. Students appear to recognize this, photographing the river as it actually is: useful, familiar, and worth documenting.

➢ *The Rice Field*

Rice fields constitute the second most frequently photographed theme in the collection. The landscape of terraced wet-rice cultivation is central to Kecamatan Gading's identity as an agrarian district, and this centrality is clearly reflected in the students' visual choices.

The rice field photographs document the agricultural cycle in remarkable detail. Students captured fields at every visible stage: newly planted plots with young seedlings standing in shallow water, mature green fields approaching harvest, and golden-yellow fields ready for cutting. During the documentation period, some fields were photographed in their dry, fallow state—bunds exposed, soil cracked, waiting for the next planting season.

A consistent compositional feature across the set is the *pematang* (field bund)—the narrow raised path that separates one plot from another. Students frequently positioned themselves on or beside these bunds, using them as pathways and vantage points. The photographs rarely show close-ups of rice plants themselves; instead, they frame the field as a landscape, with mountains, hills, or stands of coconut palms in the background.

Table 5 Rice Field Photographs by Growth Stage

Stage	Description	Approximate count
Newly planted	Young seedlings in flooded plots	3
Green / growing	Mature green rice	6
Yellowing / pre-harvest	Golden fields ready for cutting	3
Dry / fallow	Harvested or uncultivated plots	7
Generic / unclear	Field visible but stage indeterminate	11
Total	**~30**	

The table classifies photographs by the visible stage of rice cultivation at the time of documentation. "Generic/unclear" includes images where a rice field is present but the growth stage cannot be reliably determined from the photograph. Counts are approximate because several photographs show more than one stage across different parts of the field. The predominance of "dry/fallow" images suggests that the documentation period coincided with a transitional phase in the agricultural cycle.



Fig 2 A Student on a *pematang* with Terraced Rice Fields Behind

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Through the lens of the Pandalungan perspective, rice paddies emerge as a shared cultural landscape. Although individual plots are owned or leased by specific households, the rice fields as a whole constitute a communal environment—traversed by footpaths, served by irrigation channels, and cultivated according to a collectively agreed-upon seasonal rhythm. Widiyawati (2019) identifies the Pandalungan people as an inherently agrarian society, whose land-based livelihoods shape their social relations and daily routines. Tjahyadi et al. (2021) further characterize the Pandalungan community as possessing an "agrarian-egalitarian" nature, evidenced by their openness and their reliance on shared agricultural space. The photographs taken by the students reflect this: the rice fields are not presented as isolated private property, but rather as part of an interconnected agricultural landscape.

Rice farming practices in Gading are not immune to pressures. Recent economic analysis of Probolinggo Regency confirms that the agricultural sector remains dominant, contributing between 25 and 30 percent to the regional GDP and employing 42.51 percent of the workforce (Junaedi et al., 2026). However, the same analysis highlights persistent challenges: a heavy reliance on primary commodities, climate variability, and limited processing capacity to enhance value-added products. Consequently, the rice fields captured by the students are more than just picturesque scenery; they are tangible manifestations of an economically vulnerable system. The dry, fallow (unplanted) land seen in some of the photographs may reflect seasonal cycles, but it also hints at broader uncertainties—a hallmark of small-scale, community-based agriculture in the region.

However, the agricultural landscape is also a site of innovation and education. Haryadi et al. (2022) document how Wangkal Village—a neighboring village within Kecamatan Gading—has developed the Nolobranti area into an *agroeduwisata* (agro-educational tourism) destination. The program combines river tubing with training in organic farming, biopesticide production, and *mina padi* (integrated rice-fish farming). This development is significant because it demonstrates that the rice field is not merely a site of production but can become a space of learning for the wider community. For the students of SMPN 2 Gading, whose photographs capture the fields surrounding their school, this emerging model suggests a future in which their agricultural landscape serves both livelihood and education.

Through the ECLL lens, rice fields offer exceptionally rich pedagogical material. Javanese and Madurese rice cultivation possess an extensive vocabulary for growth stages, water management, tools, and seasonal labor. Research on Javanese rice terminology documents dozens of terms distinguishing stages of plant development, soil conditions, and irrigation practices—much of which is no longer actively transmitted to younger generations (Kemdikbud, 2019). When students photograph a rice field, they are engaging with a domain that has deep linguistic and cultural roots. The visual documentation thus becomes a starting point for recovering and practicing vocabulary that might otherwise be lost.

Moreover, the field is not a static backdrop. It changes visibly across the agricultural cycle, requiring students to observe and describe differences—a core skill in ECLL's approach to language through environmental observation. The seasonal variation captured in the photographs (from flooded planting to dry harvest) demonstrates that students are attentive to these changes, even when they do not participate directly in cultivation.

Overall, the photographs of the rice fields depict a landscape that serves simultaneously as an economic foundation, a cultural heritage, and a site for learning. The students' choice to capture the rice fields at various stages demonstrates their grasp of agricultural rhythms and an awareness that this landscape is not static, but rather cyclical. This awareness aligns with both theoretical frameworks employed: the rice fields reflect the communal and agrarian character typical of Pandalungan culture, while also serving as an effective basis for an Environment-Centered Learning (ECLL) approach—acting as a starting point for observation, vocabulary enrichment, and a deeper understanding of the environment.

A notable pattern is that the students rarely photographed themselves within the rice fields; instead, they preferred to stand on the embankments, along the edges, or on nearby footpaths. While this positioning may stem from practical considerations—such as avoiding damage to the crops or respecting land boundaries—it also reveals a specific relationship with the landscape: one characterized by close-range observation rather than direct, hands-on engagement. The rice fields are recognized, yet not entered. This may be a defining characteristic of a younger generation that grows up alongside the agricultural world without being directly involved in farming labor—a pattern that is becoming increasingly common as rural livelihoods grow more diverse.

- *Tobacco*

Tobacco plots appear far less frequently in the photographic collection than rivers or rice fields. Only four images document this crop, all taken by Grade 7 students. While the visual record is sparse, this scarcity must be understood against the socioeconomic realities of the students' lives—where tobacco is not merely a landscape feature, but a site of family labor and seasonal income.

The tobacco photographs share a distinct visual character. Unlike the open, horizontal vistas of rice fields, tobacco images are enclosed and vertical. Students positioned themselves *among* the plants, with broad green leaves filling the frame around them. The photographs show mature tobacco approaching harvest, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. No image depicts harvesting, drying, or processing—only the standing crop.

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Table 6 Tobacco Photographs by Visual Motif

Motif	Description	Approximate count
Student among tobacco plants	Student framed by tall tobacco, leaves prominent	3
Tobacco plot only	Field visible without student in frame	1
Total	**4**	

All four photographs were taken by Grade 7 students. No tobacco-related images appear in the Grade 8 or Grade 9 collections. The absence of post-harvest or processing imagery is notable given that tobacco curing and drying are visually distinctive activities that occur in and around village spaces.



Fig 3 A Student Standing Among Mature Tobacco Plants

Tobacco emerges as a crop deeply embedded in the region's agrarian economy. Probolinggo Regency is one of East Java's major tobacco producers; recent data indicate that tobacco planting areas in the regency exceed 11,000 hectares, with the Paiton VO variety dominating cultivation (Antara News Jawa Timur, 2025). The crop is economically significant for smallholder families. However, the visual data—and the socioeconomic context of the school—suggest that students encounter tobacco primarily through the lens of *labor* and *economic necessity* rather than mere observation.

This reality is rooted in the students' household conditions. As noted during preparatory meetings with the school's vice principal, the majority of families in the SMPN 2 Gading community belong to low-income households: *"Disini sekolah terkecil bapak... hanya ada 80 siswa"* (This is the smallest school, sir... there are only 80 students), she explained, adding that many parents earn below the regional minimum wage and struggle to provide pocket money for their children (Interview, October 2026). To overcome this, many students work alongside their parents or neighbors, particularly during peak agricultural seasons.

During harvest season, this economic necessity directly intersects with education. The school officially permits students to take leave from classes during the harvest period because agricultural labor becomes intensely demanding. This policy, while pragmatic, underscores the extent to which the children are integrated into the agricultural workforce. A baseline study conducted by SMERU in Probolinggo found that child involvement in tobacco cultivation is relatively low compared to other regions, with 10.7% prevalence during peak season (Andrina et al., 2020). However, when children do participate, their work is concentrated in post-harvest processing rather than field cultivation (Andrina et al., 2020). The photographs capture the field *before* this labor begins, which may explain why the crop appears as vegetation rather than as work—students are more likely to photograph the field when it is tranquil, not when they are tired from harvesting it.

From the perspective of ECLL, the tobacco plant offers a complex vocabulary that is not fully captured in the photographs taken by the students. The plant encompasses a wide range of terms—covering specific tobacco varieties (such as Paiton VO, Jawa, and Kasturi), stages of growth, drying methods, and market quality classifications (Antara News East Java, 2025; Sindonews, 2025). In contrast, the visual records depict tobacco merely as a uniform expanse of green, with little discernible distinction between different parts of the plant or its various growth phases. This suggests that while the students recognize tobacco as a feature of their environment, their engagement is rooted more in physical labor than in learning through structured observation. They encounter the plant through direct, hands-on experience rather than through descriptive language—a gap that ECLL seeks to bridge by connecting everyday lived experiences with linguistic expression (Nur et al., 2022; Tatin et al., 2024).

The economic volatility of tobacco further shapes how young people perceive the crop. During the documentation period, farmers in Kecamatan Gading reported that unseasonal rain had damaged crops, forcing premature harvest and lowering prices. In 2025, a farmer from Desa Kertosono added that his harvested tobacco sold for Rp38,000 to Rp43,000 per kilogram, compared to Rp50,000 to Rp75,000 in a good year (Mustopa, 2025). For students working in these fields, the uncertainty of the harvest translates directly into the uncertainty of their family's income and their own ability to continue schooling.

The tobacco photographs reveal a crop that is economically central but visually peripheral in the student collection. The students documented tobacco as a presence—a plant they see and recognize—rather than as a process or *livelihood.* This distinction matters for understanding how rural youth perceive their agrarian surroundings. They know tobacco exists; they also know what it costs to harvest it. The absence of labor imagery in their photographs does not indicate a lack of familiarity, but rather a normalization of

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work that is too routine, or too exhausting, to be framed as a subject for documentation.

➢ *Cross-Cutting Patterns*

While the preceding sections examined the river, the rice field, and the tobacco plot as distinct subjects, placing them side by side reveals three cross-cutting patterns that unify the visual data.

First, the students consistently positioned themselves as observers at the edge of the frame. In the river photographs, they stand on rocks; in the rice fields, they stand on the *pematang* (bunds); in the tobacco plots, they stand on the narrow dirt paths. This "proximity without immersion" reflects a respectful distance from the working elements of the landscape. From the ECLL perspective, this demonstrates students actively acting as documenters of their environment rather than simply playing in it (Nur et al., 2022; Tatin et al., 2024).

Second, the landscapes presented feature visual layers that blend nature, infrastructure, and the economy. A photograph of a river reveals a concrete sluice gate; an image of a rice paddy shows terraced embankments set against distant hills; while a photo of a tobacco field depicts the crops framed by the sky. This aligns with the concept of the "Pandalungan" hybrid landscape, in which the environment is not pristine wilderness, but rather an area managed and utilized for productive activities (Ilham, 2022; Widiyawati, 2019). The students do not separate "nature" from human activity; instead, they capture the environment as a collectively managed space—a setting where agricultural labor takes place.

Third, there is a clear visual normalization of labor. Rivers and rice paddies dominate the collection, presented with a serene and picturesque quality, whereas the tobacco harvest—arguably the most economically crucial commodity for their families—appears only on the visual periphery. This hierarchy suggests that the students photograph what is aesthetically accessible to them, while the grueling labor that often forces them to miss school during harvest season is perceived as a mundane, ordinary aspect of work—not as a subject worthy of documentation.

Together, these patterns show that the students of SMPN 2 Gading do not perceive their environment as a collection of isolated resources, but as a hybrid, working landscape. From the Pandalungan perspective, they are documenting a shared, agrarian-egalitarian space (Tjahyadi et al., 2021). From the ECLL perspective, their visual choices reveal a foundational environmental literacy—but one that still requires pedagogical scaffolding to help them articulate the labor and economy behind the scenery (Tatin et al., 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

This article analyzed 117 field photographs produced by students at SMPN 2 Gading, focusing on the river, rice field, and tobacco plot. Interpreted through Pandalungan cultural hybridity and Eco-Cultural Language Learning (ECLL), the visual data reveal how rural youth frame their landscape as a working, layered environment rather than passive scenery. The river emerges as a shared communal space, the rice field as a cyclical cultural landscape, and tobacco as an economically central yet visually peripheral crop shaped by labor and seasonal necessity.

The findings address both research questions. Students documented the familiar places that anchor their daily routines—rivers, fields, and paths—while their photographs simultaneously reflected broader socio-economic realities, including agricultural labor and economic vulnerability. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that photovoice functions as a pedagogical tool within ECLL, supporting SDG 4 by connecting language learning to environmental observation and place-based education.

The study is limited to a single community service program at one school and does not analyze students' written narratives. Future research should integrate image and text, compare across villages in Kecamatan Gading, and track whether participation in photovoice activities produces lasting changes in environmental awareness and local heritage connection.

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