

Integrating Ecocritical Values in *Kaba Minangkabau* into Literary Criticism Learning

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Received: September, 15, 2025

Revised: October, 20, 2025

Accepted: November, 1, 2025

Abstract

The global environmental crisis demands educational innovations that can foster ecological awareness among students. Literature, especially *kaba Minangkabau*, contains values of nature conservation that can be utilized as a learning resource. This study aims to integrate the values of ecocriticism in *kaba Minangkabau* into literary criticism learning in higher education to produce contextual, locally-based learning that supports the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) and *perguruan tinggi berdampak*. The research approach used was qualitative with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and documentation studies of 6 lecturers and 18 students from UNP, Unes, and UPGRISBA. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model. The results showed that lecturers and students were highly interested in using *kaba*, but were constrained by the limited availability of ecocritical textbooks. Content analysis of the seven *kaba* reveals four main themes of ecocriticism, namely depictions of nature, natural disasters/devastation, the relationship between humans and nature, and the author's attitude. This research produced a textbook model that combines literary criticism theory, ecocritical analysis guidelines, *kaba* case studies, and reflective activities in accordance with CPMK, thereby strengthening students' ecological literacy and encouraging pro-environmental awareness and action.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, *Kaba Minangkabau*, Literary Criticism, Textbook

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing modern civilization today is the ecological crisis. Global warming, air and water pollution, deforestation, land degradation, and declining biodiversity have become realities that threaten the future of humanity. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), global temperatures have risen by 1.2°C compared to pre-industrial levels and are predicted to exceed the 1.5°C threshold within the next two decades. This phenomenon has a serious impact on the global climate system, resulting in extreme weather, drought, flooding, and loss of ecosystems. As awareness of the impact of the environmental crisis increases, various disciplines are beginning to turn their attention to ecological issues. One approach that has developed in literary studies is ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between literary texts and nature and environmental issues (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2012). Ecocriticism encourages readers to understand how literature not only reflects human and environmental relations, but also serves as an educational medium that can shape ecological awareness.

Ecocritical studies have developed globally, as demonstrated by (Goga et al., 2023), who explored eco-critical dialogue in teacher education in Norway, and (Manolchev & Kirchherr, 2025), who analyzed ecopedagogy in higher education as a transformative approach. However, its implementation in higher education in Indonesia is still limited.. Studies by Xiong et al. (2013) dan Winter et al. (2022) shows

that only a small number of higher education institutions in China have formally integrated ecocriticism into their curricula. In the United States and Europe, environmental humanities programs have grown significantly and have become compulsory courses at all universities (Oppermann & Iovino, 2016). However, similar approaches are not yet widely found in the Indonesian context. In Indonesian higher education, literary criticism approaches are still predominantly oriented towards structuralism, literary psychology, literary sociology, and other formalistic approaches (Nurgiantoro, 2010). Furthermore, Coghi (2021) states that ecocriticism is increasingly being integrated into literature courses to encourage students to reflect on environmental issues and the ethical implications of human interaction with nature. According to Liao (2024), ecological literary criticism theory can be integrated into college literature teaching through a learning model that combines ecological perspectives, which has been proven to be more effective than traditional teaching methods. However, the lack of textbooks that integrate environmental values into the analysis of local texts also complicates the integration process.

Amidst the urgency of the need for environment-based education, literary criticism in higher education still lacks local literary texts that are rich in environmental conservation values. This is ironic considering that Indonesia has a wealth of oral literary traditions, such as *kaba Minangkabau*, which contain many ecological messages. *Kaba* is a form of epic narrative of the Minangkabau people, which not only describes social relations but also reflects the community's cosmological and ecological views of nature (Nofrahadi et al., 2022). In *kaba* texts such as *Cindua Mato*, *Si Gadiah Ranti*, and *Si Buyuang Karuik*, there are explicit descriptions of the importance of balance with nature, protection of forests and water, and customary sanctions against environmental destruction. In practice, teaching materials in higher education, especially in Literary Criticism courses, rarely use *kaba* as a subject of study. Students tend to be introduced to modern or contemporary literary works that do not always reflect local wisdom or ecological values. This condition weakens the relationship between literature and the ecological realities that are being faced, and severs the continuity between local culture and modern education.

Several factors contribute to the lack of integration of ecocritical values into literary criticism education, which can be identified as follows. *First*, dependence on Western models of criticism, namely that literary criticism curricula in Indonesian universities generally refer to Western theories without adapting them to the local context (Wiyatmi et al., 2019). Approaches such as structuralism, deconstruction, and formalism still dominate learning, so that environment-based approaches have not yet gained their rightful place. Similarly, the integration of literature based on local wisdom into learning has not yet been developed, threatening the preservation of local literature (Darmawati et al., 2024). *Second*, the lack of textbooks based on local ecocriticism. The absence of textbooks that combine ecocriticism with local literature makes it difficult for lecturers to teach the material systematically. In addition, studies by Novianti (2016) suggests that Indonesian literature lecturers face several challenges, including selecting appropriate literary texts and the availability of resources. These challenges are exacerbated by the need to adapt the material to students' language abilities and cultural backgrounds (Zulfadhli et al., 2024). *Third*, the lack of training or workshops for lecturers. The ecocritical approach requires interdisciplinary understanding that literature lecturers have not yet acquired through training or academic capacity building activities. *Fourth*, the assumption that *kaba* is an irrelevant traditional product. Some educators and students consider *kaba* to be a product that is irrelevant in a modern context, even though the ecological values contained within it are actually very relevant to contemporary issues. (Oktavianus et al., 2023; Handoko et al., 2024).

This condition shows that there is an urgent need to reorient literary criticism in higher education. This is done in order to be more sensitive to environmental issues and to be able to utilize local resources that are rich in conservation values. The use of *kaba Minangkabau* as an ecocritical teaching resource not only provides space for the revitalization of local culture, but also encourages the growth of ecological awareness among students through a humanities approach. Love (2003) asserts that the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination, and therefore literature and education have a strategic role to play in shaping new ecologically-minded perspectives. Furthermore, this strategy is also in line with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2022), which emphasizes the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and conative aspects in education, as well as supporting local culture as part of sustainable development.

This article offers novelty in two important ways. *First*, it explicitly combines an ecocritical approach with a study of the local literary genre of *kaba Minangkabau* for the purpose of developing a textbook on literary criticism. Although several previous studies have examined ecocriticism in modern

Indonesian literature, studies focusing on *kaba Minangkabau* as the main object are still very rare. This study positions *kaba* not merely as a cultural artifact, but as a source of ecological knowledge that can be used to foster environmental awareness among students. Thus, this article expands the scope of ecocriticism, which has been widely applied to modern literature, novels, and contemporary poetry. *Second*, this article combines the academic perspectives of lecturers and student learning facilitators from three universities to design a concept for a local wisdom-based literary criticism textbook. The integration of this field data provides a strong empirical foundation, so that the research results are not only conceptual but also contextual in accordance with the real needs in the classroom. This is in line with the findings of Yi & Jung (2017) that effective environmental humanities must be rooted in the local context and involve educational stakeholders in order to bring about changes in ecological perspectives and behavior.

Based on this background, this article is titled “Integrating Ecocritical Values in *Kaba Minangkabau* into Literary Criticism Learning”. This title emphasizes the importance of presenting environmental conservation values in literary education through an ecocritical approach to local texts. This study specifically aims to explore the potential of *Kaba Minangkabau* as a relevant teaching resource in ecocritical based literary criticism learning at the university level. This research was conducted with the participation of students and lecturers from three universities, namely Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP), Universitas Ekasakti (Unes), and Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat (UPGRISBA). These three campuses were chosen because they have Indonesian Language and Literature Study Programs that actively organize literature in regions rich in local traditions such as Minangkabau. The involvement of students and lecturers in this research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the perceptions, needs, and opportunities for the development of literary criticism textbooks that integrate the ecocritical values of *kaba Minangkabau*.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to understand phenomena in depth, holistically, and contextually (Creswell, John W., 2018), namely the integration of eco-critical values in Minangkabau *kaba* into literary criticism learning. The case study design was used because the research focused on exploring the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of lecturers and students with similar characteristics (Yin, 2018). In this case, lecturers and students at three universities in West Sumatra have similar characteristics but with different institutional contexts. The subjects of this study are students and lecturers teaching Literary Criticism courses at three universities in West Sumatra, namely UNP, Unes, dan UPGRISBA. The research subjects consisted of 6 lecturers and 18 students who had taken the Literary Criticism course and were considered to have good reflective abilities. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account the informants' representativeness and experience in learning literary criticism (Palinkas et al., 2015). Data collection techniques were conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation studies of the semester learning plan (RPS), syllabus, and teaching materials. The main instrument of this study was the researcher himself. To support the validity of the data, auxiliary instruments were used in the form of semi-structured interview guides and observation sheets. The data analysis technique uses a model (Miles & Huberman, 2014) that includes three main activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity is strengthened through source triangulation (lecturers, students, and documents) and technique triangulation (interviews, FGDs, classroom observations, and documentation studies).

Result and Discussion

The results of this study are presented systematically to answer the research objectives, namely to integrate *kaba Minangkabau* ecocritical values into literary criticism learning in higher education. Data obtained from in-depth interviews, FGDs, classroom observations, and documentation studies were analyzed by reducing data, grouping data, and drawing conclusions relevant to the research focus. Furthermore, the discussion of the research results focuses on several aspects, namely (1) informant profiles and research context, (2) lecturers' perceptions of ecocritical integration, (3) students' views on the relevance of *kaba* in literary criticism learning, (4) thematic analysis of ecocritical values in *kaba*

Minangkabau texts, and (5) the design of a conceptual model for an ecocriticism-based literary criticism textbook. Each finding is discussed in depth with reference to the theory of ecocriticism in the environmental humanities approach.

1. Informant Profile and Research Context

This study involved 24 informants from three universities in West Sumatra, namely UNP, Unes, and UPGRISBA. There were six lecturers with the majority holding master's and doctoral degrees and having an average of 5-15 years of experience teaching literary criticism courses (actively publishing scientific articles). Eighteen students were selected using purposive sampling with the criteria of having taken literary criticism courses, having a grade of $\geq B$, and being active in academic activities such as seminars and literary discussions. The findings show that the three campuses have relatively similar curricula, namely literary criticism theory taught covers objective criticism, mimesis, pragmatics, expressiveness, and feminism. The teaching materials used are mostly theory books written by UNP lecturers and articles in English, so that the connection with local literature such as *kaba Minangkabau* is almost never discussed systematically. This condition creates a pedagogical gap between the potential of local culture and classroom learning. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of a local wisdom based curriculum to strengthen student identity and foster ecological awareness (Tilaar, 2012; Mulyanie & Setiawan, 2024).

2. Lecturers Perceptions of Ecocritical Integration

The results of in-depth interviews show that 5 out of 6 lecturers agree and support the integration of ecocritical values into literary criticism learning. The themes that emerged from the coding analysis include: (a) the lack of contextual material (lecturers feel that teaching materials still refer too much to Western theory); (b) the potential of *kaba* as a teaching medium (lecturers see that *kaba* is rich in ecological wisdom values such as prohibitions against destroying forests, respect for water sources, social sanctions against behavior that damages nature, etc.); (c) expectations for new textbooks (lecturers emphasized the need for textbooks that systematically present guidelines for ecocritical analysis so that students have a clear framework). The interview results show that most lecturers acknowledge the importance of integrating eco-critical values into literary criticism learning. They see *kaba Minangkabau* as a text rich in ecological messages and potential to enrich students' learning experiences. However, they highlight the limitations of textbooks that accommodate the eco-critical approach systematically. These findings indicate an urgent need for curriculum innovation and the development of relevant teaching resources, in line with Oppermann & Iovino (2016) deas regarding the importance of place-based environmental humanities that connect theory with the local cultural context.

3. Students Views on The Relevance of Kaba in Literary Criticism Learning

The results of the FGD from the three campuses revealed that students had a high level of interest in the use of *kaba* as a teaching medium. Three main themes emerged, as follows. (a) Contextualization of learning, namely that students feel that the use of *kaba* will make it easier for them to understand the concept of ecocriticism because it is related to the social and cultural realities they are familiar with. (b) Strengthening cultural identity, namely that students believe that *kaba* based learning will strengthen their pride in regional literature and help them internalize local values. (c) Ecological awareness, namely that students claimed to better understand the importance of protecting forests, water, and soil after discussing *kaba* that tells stories of disasters caused by natural destruction. These results are in line with Garrard (2012) who emphasizes that literature can function as a medium for environmental education by building readers' emotional connection to ecological issues.

4. Thematic Analysis of Ecocritical Values in *kaba Minangkabau* Texts

This analysis was conducted on the seven most popular *kaba* texts, namely *Cindua Mato*, *Si Buyuang karuik*, *Tuanku Lareh Simawang*, *Si Gadih Ranti*, *Puti Nilam Cayo*, *Siti Kalasun*, and *Siti Baheram*. Based on the thematic analysis conducted, four main categories of ecocritical values were identified, as follows.

Tabel 1. Thematic Analysis

Ecocriticism Theme	Findings in <i>Kaba</i>	Ecocriticism Interpretation	Implications for Learning
Depiction of Nature	Mountains, rivers, and forests are depicted as sacred spaces and sources of life.	Describing the spiritual relationship between humans and the environment.	Teaching students to see nature as a subject, not merely an object.
Damage/Natural Disaster	Stories of floods, landslides, and disasters that occurred due to the greed of public figures.	Becoming a metaphor for ecological degradation.	Encouraging students to discuss the consequences of environmental damage.
The Relationship Between Humans and Nature	Customs prohibit indiscriminate logging and protect water sources.	Demonstrating culturally based ecological ethics.	Helping students understand local wisdom as a form of conservation.
The Author's Attitude	The moral message emphasizes the importance of harmony between humans and nature.	The author's expression of ecological concern.	Students learn to identify authorial stance in works.

These findings show that *kaba Minangkabau* not only has aesthetic value, but can also be used as a source of critical learning about ecological ethics and sustainability.

5. The Design of a Conceptual Model for an Ecocriticism Based Literary Criticism Textbook

Based on the results of the documentation study, this research formulates a conceptual model of textbooks with components supported by Course Learning Outcomes (CPMK) as follows.

Table 2. Textbook Structure

Textbook Chapter	Main Content	Supported CPMK
Chapter 1: Introduction to Literary Criticism	a. Definition of literary criticism, its scope, function, and role in literary studies b. The urgency of literary criticism as a means of understanding works c. The importance of ecological literacy in literary education	CPMK 1 (Students are able to explain the meaning, scope, and function of literary criticism)
Chapter 2: Literary Criticism Theory & Ecocriticism Approach	a. Various theories of literary criticism (structuralism, semiotics, Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, postcolonialism, etc.) b. Theories and principles of ecocriticism c. The relevance of ecocriticism to education and local wisdom	CPMK 2 (Students are able to explain and distinguish various approaches and theories of literary criticism, including ecocriticism)
Chapter 3: <i>Kaba Minangkabau</i> as a Subject of Study	a. History, function, and structure of <i>kaba</i> b. Minangkabau cultural values (customs, natural law, social ethics) c. Representation of nature, human-nature relations, and natural disasters in <i>kaba</i>	CPMK 3 (Students are able to explain the ecocritical approach while understanding the characteristics of local literature as a subject of study)
Chapter 4: Case Studies and Analysis Exercises	a. Steps in ecocritical analysis (identification of themes, setting, characters, conflicts, ecological messages)	CPMK 4 (Students are able to analyze literary works using specific approaches systematically)

Chapter 5: Case Studies and Analysis Exercises	b. Detailed analysis of one <i>kaba</i> a. Presentation of several selected <i>kaba</i> texts b. Group analysis exercises, discussions, and presentations c. Reflection on analysis results	CPMK 5 (Students are able to hone their skills in analyzing and interpreting eco-critical values in an applied manner)
Chapter 6: Writing Literary Criticism Based on Ecocriticism	a. Techniques for writing critical essays b. Academic writing formats in accordance with scientific principles c. Scientific ethics in citing and presenting analysis results	CPMK 5 (Students are able to produce literary criticism that contains in-depth analysis in accordance with academic principles and ethical values)
Chapter 7: Reflection & Environmental Action	a. Connecting the results of the analysis with current environmental issues b. Student projects (environmental campaigns, posters, vlogs, or popular articles) c. Self-evaluation (how learning has changed your perspective on nature)	CPMK 6 (Students are able to apply what they have learned to real-world actions that support ecological awareness)

Thus, the conceptual model of this eco-criticism-based literary criticism textbook is not only in line with the CPMK for the Literary Criticism course, but also enriches the learning experience of students through the integration of local wisdom and ecological values. The presence of this model is expected to bridge the gap between the literary criticism theory taught in class and the real need for environmental literacy and cultural identity. Furthermore, this design can serve as a flexible prototype that can be adapted by lecturers at various universities. This will ensure that literary criticism education not only fosters analytical skills, but also ecological awareness and concern for environmental sustainability.

The results of this study show a gap between the potential of Minangkabau local literary wealth and the practice of teaching literary criticism at the universities studied, namely UNP, Unes, and UPGRISBA. Based on preliminary findings, the literary criticism curriculum at the three campuses is still dominated by Western theories such as feminism, Marxism, and structuralism, while the ecocritical approach is rarely explored in depth in class. The teaching materials used are mostly general textbooks, which do not provide opportunities for students to interact with local texts that are rich in cultural and ecological values. This condition confirms the view that literary criticism in Indonesia tends to focus more on universal theories and still rarely utilizes the potential of local literature in various media for student character development (Hamsiah et al., 2017; Palennari et al., 2023). Ecological literacy needs to be integrated into literary studies to build ecological sensitivity, especially amid an increasingly apparent global crisis (Chaichana & Rawang, 2019; Gurr & Forster, 2023). Furthermore, Helda et al. (2021) conducted research discussing the use of Minangkabau cultural media (films) in language learning and understanding of local culture in higher education, while Gusnetti et al. (2021) researched the development of teaching materials based on local culture. Thus, this study aims to bridge this epistemological gap by presenting *kaba Minangkabau* as a learning tool that can foster ecological awareness while strengthening cultural identity.

Interviews with lecturers teaching Literary Criticism courses revealed a high level of awareness of the importance of integrating eco-critical values into learning. Five out of six lecturers agreed that *kaba* can be used as a medium for teaching literary criticism theory, especially ecocriticism, because *kaba* texts contain descriptions of nature, prohibitions against excessive exploitation, and moral messages that teach the balance of human relations with the environment. They assessed that so far, literary criticism learning has been too focused on mastering theory without paying attention to social and ecological relevance. These findings are in line with the ideas of Yi & Jung (2017) dan Loaiza & Viviana (2024), who emphasize that environmental humanities must be rooted in local experiences in order to be more meaningful and capable of driving social transformation. However, the lecturer also mentioned that one of the obstacles is the limited availability of textbooks that provide practical guidance on how to analyze *kaba* from an ecocritical perspective. A similar obstacle was identified by (Estok, 2018) who mentioned

the need to provide learning resources that can bridge theory and practice without sacrificing academic depth.

On the other hand, students showed a positive response to the use of *kaba* as teaching material. They admitted that they were interested and felt that learning would be more interesting if they used texts that were close to their lives. The students' emotional involvement increased when they were asked to analyze *kaba* that told stories of disasters or natural destruction as a result of human actions. This is in line with the opinion of Sufeng & Runjuan (2014), who emphasized that literature is capable of building readers' ecological imagination and mobilizing their ecological awareness. Students also felt that *kaba*-based learning helped them contextualize literary criticism theory, which can feel abstract. In other words, integrating *kaba* into learning promotes the achievement of a culturally responsive curriculum. This is effective in increasing learning motivation and building students' cultural identity. (Sihombing et al., 2025; Albar et al., 2025).

A thematic analysis of seven *kaba* texts reveals four main ecocritical themes, namely the depiction of nature, natural disasters or destruction, the relationship between humans and nature, and the author's attitude towards nature. The description of nature in *kaba* is not only the setting for events, but also has symbolic and spiritual functions, and depicts the relationship between humans and nature as something sacred. Several *kaba* stories tell of floods, landslides, or natural curses as a result of the characters' greed, thus becoming metaphors for ecological degradation. In addition, many *kaba* stories contain traditional teachings that emphasize the prohibition of indiscriminate logging and the importance of protecting water sources, indicating the existence of a culture-based ecological ethic. These results support Heise (2008) idea of a sense of place, which is human awareness of their connection to space and their living environment. Thus, *kaba* can be understood as ecological documents that function as a medium for transmitting conservation knowledge from generation to generation.

Based on the results of interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and content analysis, this study designed a conceptual model for an eco-criticism-based literary criticism textbook that combines theory, analytical practice, and student creative projects. This textbook has chapters organized according to the course learning outcomes (CPMK), starting from an introduction to literary criticism, ecocriticism theory, *kaba* text presentation, analysis guidelines, case studies, analysis exercises, to critical essay writing. In addition, this textbook is equipped with reflection and environmental action activities that encourage students to connect their learning outcomes with contemporary environmental issues. This model is in line with the principles of Outcome-Based Education because it is designed to ensure that students achieve analytical competence, an understanding of ecological values, and character-oriented literary criticism writing skills. This model also supports contextual and project-based learning activities and is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) points 4 (quality education) and 13 (climate action).

Theoretically, the results of this study expand the scope of ecocriticism from its previous application mainly in modern and contemporary literature to traditional Indonesian literature. This enriches the discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism. Huggan & Tiffin (2010) argue that local narratives can be a source of ecological knowledge relevant to sustainability issues. In practical terms, this research offers a concrete solution in the form of a textbook model that can be used by lecturers in various universities. With this model, students not only master literary criticism theory, but also gain ecological awareness and skills to link literary analysis with concrete actions in preserving the environment. This research also supports efforts to preserve *kaba* as cultural heritage, as it encourages young people to read it critically and make it part of their academic practice.

Conclusion

This study confirms that integrating Minangkabau *kaba* values into literary criticism teaching at universities is a good idea. Lecturers and students from UNP, Unes, and UPGRISBA think using *kaba* is relevant and interesting, but they've been held back by a lack of contextual teaching materials. Analysis of *kaba* reveals four main ecocritical themes, namely depictions of nature, environmental destruction, human-nature relations, and the author's attitude, which can be used as a means of ecological literacy. The resulting textbook model combines literary criticism theory, ecocritical analysis guidelines, *kaba* case studies, and reflective activities in accordance with the CPMK. With this resource, students are expected not only to master literary analysis skills but also to develop ecological awareness and concern for the environment. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse of ecocriticism by

showing how local oral literature can be an important source in literary environmental studies, while expanding the scope of ecocriticism, which has been dominated by Western literary canon. In practical terms, this research supports the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) and impactful higher education programs (*perguruan tinggi berdampak*) by providing contextual, project-based learning that is relevant to community issues. The resulting textbook can serve as a national prototype to encourage a literary curriculum that is responsive to environmental issues and based on local wisdom. These findings also provide opportunities for further research to test the effectiveness of textbooks in quantitatively improving students' ecological literacy and assessing their impact on pro-environmental behavioral change. However, this study has limitations in its geographical coverage, which is limited to three universities in West Sumatra, and has not empirically tested the effectiveness of textbooks in improving students' ecological literacy. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the effectiveness of textbooks through quantitative experiments, explore the value of ecocriticism in the oral literature of other ethnic groups in Indonesia, and conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact on changes in students' pro-environmental behavior. Thus, the findings of this study open up opportunities for the development of literary education that is not only academic but also transformative for ecological awareness and the preservation of local wisdom in Indonesia.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Negeri Padang for funding this work with a contract number: 1620/UN35.15/LT/2025.

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