

A Critical Analysis of the Supernatural Approach Between Environmental Education and School Ceremonialism

Moh Zulandri^{1*}, Erwin Zainuddin², Meggi Rahayu³, Muh. Rizal⁴, Dewi Rara¹

¹⁻⁵Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu

*Corresponding Author: E-mail: zulandri.yotolembah@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Adiwiyata program is one of the strategic policies of the Indonesian government in realizing sustainable environmental education in schools. Since its launch in 2006 by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF), the program is designed to instill ecological values through integration into the curriculum, school culture, and citizen participation. However, the implementation in various schools shows a paradox: on the one hand, Adiwiyata succeeds in encouraging increased concern for the environment, but on the other hand, the practice of its implementation is often trapped in ceremonialism. This phenomenon can be seen from the school orientation that emphasizes the achievement of awards, certifications, and competitions rather than the deep internalization of ecological values. This article aims to conduct a critical analysis of the Adiwiyata approach using a literature-based theoretical study method (desk study). The results of the study show that there is a gap between the normative goal of Adiwiyata as an instrument of ecological awareness transformation and the practice of educational bureaucratic ceremonialism that emphasizes the formal aspect. This article offers a reconstruction of the Adiwiyata approach through the integration of ecological curriculum, the formation of a green school culture, and sustainable community participation. Thus, Adiwiyata not only becomes a symbol of administrative success, but actually serves as a transformative and substantial medium of environmental education.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues in the 21st century are one of the most pressing challenges faced by all countries in the world. Climate change, forest degradation, air pollution, reduced biodiversity, and clean water crises are realities that are increasingly felt by humans. The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report confirms that human activities have contributed significantly to the acceleration of global climate change, with widespread impacts on ecosystems and human well-being.

This condition confirms the importance of systematic efforts to build ecological awareness through education. In the Indonesian context, the urgency of environmental education is strengthened by the high level of ecological damage. Data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) shows that the rate of deforestation in Indonesia reaches hundreds of thousands of hectares every year, in addition to the increasing volume of plastic waste and water pollution in urban areas. This situation makes environmental education a key strategy to instill sustainability values in the young generation from school age. Education is not only seen as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a means of transforming behavior and forming ecological awareness. One of the prominent environmental education policies in Indonesia is the Adiwiyata Program. First launched in 2006, this program aims to make schools a vehicle for environmental learning through the integration of environmentally friendly principles in the curriculum, learning activities, and school culture. Normatively, Adiwiyata has a vision to form schools that care about and have an environmental culture, with four main principles: participatory, sustainable, curriculum-based, and environmentally cultured. However, in its implementation, a number of criticisms have emerged that highlight the paradox in the implementation of Adiwiyata. Many studies have found that schools emphasize physical and symbolic aspects to meet the

Adiwiyata assessment indicators rather than internalizing ecological values in the daily lives of school residents. For example, schools are busy beautifying parks, painting walls green, or preparing administrative documents when there is an assessment, but after the award is achieved, the eco-friendly activities are reduced in intensity. This phenomenon shows that programs that are actually aimed at building ecological awareness are often trapped in the pattern of educational ceremonialism.

Ceremonialism in the context of education can be understood as a tendency to prioritize symbolic or formal aspects over substance. In the perspective of organizational sociology, Meyer and Rowan refer to this phenomenon as "myth and ceremony", i.e. institutional practices that emphasize formal adherence to certain rules or symbols, but are not always accompanied by substantive changes in organizational behavior and culture. When associated with Adiwiyata, ceremonialism appears in the form of competitions, certifications, or awards that take precedence over sustainable changes in the ecological attitudes of students and teachers. This phenomenon poses a conceptual dilemma. On the one hand, Adiwiyata was praised as an important breakthrough in environmental education because it succeeded in making schools the basis of the environmental care movement. On the other hand, the program has been criticized for being too bureaucratic, technical, and short-term achievement-oriented. This criticism is in line with Paulo Freire's view of education that tends to be a "banking concept", namely education that emphasizes formal and procedural aspects without involving the critical awareness of students. Furthermore, recent studies show that there is a gap between Adiwiyata's normative goals and the reality of its implementation. For example, a study by Rahmawati (2016) found that in some secondary schools, Adiwiyata activities are more oriented towards achieving Adiwiyata school status rather than integrating environmental issues into the curriculum. Similarly, Sari & Prasetyo (2019) state that many schools view Adiwiyata as an administrative burden rather than an opportunity to build an environmental culture. Based on this context, this article is compiled to conduct a critical analysis of the Adiwiyata approach by highlighting the paradox between the substance of environmental education and school ceremonialism.

This study is important because it can provide a conceptual understanding of structural weaknesses in the implementation of Adiwiyata and offer a reconstruction of a more substantive and transformative approach. More specifically, this article has three main objectives. First, it describes the conceptual basis of Adiwiyata as a model of environmental education in Indonesia. Second, analyze the practice of ceremonialism in the implementation of Adiwiyata based on literature review. Third, it offers a reconstruction of the Adiwiyata approach to be more oriented towards the formation of sustainable ecological awareness. With this framework, it is hoped that this article can contribute to the development of environmental education theory as well as a policy input for the implementation of the Adiwiyata program in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a **library research (desk study)** design to critically examine the implementation of the Adiwiyata Program as an environmental education policy and its tendency toward educational ceremonialism. Library research was selected because the study aimed to analyze concepts, theories, and empirical findings from previous scholarly works rather than collecting primary field data. Through this approach, the study synthesized existing knowledge to identify the gap between the normative objectives of the Adiwiyata Program and its practical implementation in schools.

The data used in this study consisted entirely of **secondary data**, including scientific journal articles, books, government regulations and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF), UNESCO publications, policy documents, and other reputable academic sources related to environmental education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), institutional theory, organizational ceremonialism, and critical pedagogy. Priority was given to recent peer-reviewed publications published between 2020 and 2025, while seminal works relevant to the theoretical framework, such as those of Meyer and Rowan and Paulo Freire, were also included to strengthen the conceptual analysis.

Data collection was conducted through systematic literature identification, selection, and documentation. Relevant literature was searched using academic databases such as **Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Crossref, and ScienceDirect** with keywords including *Adiwiyata Program, environmental education, Education for Sustainable Development, school ceremonialism, institutional theory, ecological literacy, and critical pedagogy*. The selected literature was screened based on its relevance, credibility, publication quality, and contribution to the research objectives.

Data were analyzed using **qualitative content analysis** combined with a **critical interpretive approach**. The analysis involved four stages: (1) organizing and classifying the collected literature according to research themes; (2) reducing and coding the data to identify recurring concepts, arguments, and empirical findings; (3) comparing and interpreting the findings using environmental education theory, institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan), and Freire's critical pedagogy; and (4) synthesizing the results to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the paradox between the transformative goals of environmental education and the ceremonial practices observed in the implementation of the Adiwiyata Program. This analytical process

enabled the study to propose a conceptual reconstruction of Adiwiyata that emphasizes ecological awareness, participatory learning, and sustainable environmental culture.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied **source triangulation** by comparing information obtained from international journals, national publications, government policy documents, and authoritative institutional reports. In addition, theoretical triangulation was employed by integrating perspectives from environmental education, institutional theory, and critical pedagogy to ensure comprehensive and balanced interpretation of the literature.

Overall, the qualitative library research approach provides an appropriate methodological framework for critically examining the implementation of the Adiwiyata Program and developing conceptual recommendations for strengthening its role as a transformative environmental education model rather than merely a symbolic or ceremonial school program.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Adiwiyata Program as an Environmental Education Strategy

Normatively, the Adiwiyata Program is designed to form schools that care about and have an environmental culture. The four main principles are participatory, sustainable, curriculum-based, and environmentally cultured showing a holistic orientation towards environmental education. Through Adiwiyata, schools are expected to become centers for ecological learning, where students, teachers, and the community are actively involved in protecting the environment. Environmental education in Adiwiyata is not only manifested in practical activities such as planting trees, managing waste, or saving energy, but also through the integration of sustainability values into the curriculum. Thus, Adiwiyata can be seen as a concrete form of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which has been on UNESCO's global agenda since 2005. However, a number of studies show that this idealism is often reduced in practice. Many schools emphasize more on administrative indicators to obtain the title of Adiwiyata, while the dimension of student behavior transformation receives less attention. This raises a critical question: does Adiwiyata really function as a medium of environmental education, or is it just a means of achieving institutional prestige?

Ceremonialism in the Implementation of Adiwiyata

Meaning of Educational Ceremonialism

In institutional theory, ceremonialism refers to organizational practices that emphasize formal symbols rather than the substance of change. Meyer and Rowan (2015) call it a myth and ceremony, in which institutions adopt certain practices to appear to conform to social norms or external standards, without internalizing fundamental changes. In the context of education, ceremonialism appears in the form of activities carried out to meet external demands (e.g., accreditation, competitions, awards), but it has less impact on the transformation of students' values and behaviors.

Indications of Ceremonialism in Superstition

Based on literature studies, there are several indications of ceremonialism in the implementation of Adiwiyata:

Orientation to awardsThe school was more enthusiastic when participating in the Adiwiyata competition or the assessment of the MoEF team, but the activity decreased after the award was obtained.

Focus on the physical and cosmetic of the schoolMany schools prioritize green gardens, green wall paint, and environmentally-themed banners as symbols of ecological concern, but student learning activities on environmental issues have not developed significantly.

Administrative burdenTeachers and principals are more busy preparing administrative documents as a condition for assessment, rather than developing environmental learning innovations.

Lack of participation of school communityprograms are often run by a handful of teachers or small teams, while students and other teachers are only spectators or technical implementers.

With this condition, Adiwiyata is in danger of falling into the trap of symbolism: it seems to care for the environment formally, but the substance of critical education on ecology is underdeveloped.

The Paradox of Environmental Education and Ceremonialism

The main paradox of Adiwiyata is the difference between ideal goals and the reality of implementation. The ideal goal is to shape students' ecological awareness through a participatory educational process. However, the reality often shows that schools are busy fulfilling administrative and aesthetic indicators for the sake of the Adiwiyata predicate. This phenomenon can be understood through the theory of hidden curriculum. Apple (2013) explains that schools often teach implicit values that are not written in the official curriculum. In the case of Adiwiyata, the hidden curriculum that emerged was not ecological awareness, but formalistic values: "the important thing is to look green" or "the important thing is to get a certificate". As a result, students may learn that environmental care is only a formality of a competition, not part of their daily lifestyle. This is certainly contrary to the long-term vision of environmental education.

Factors Causing Superstitious Ceremonialism

There are several factors that cause the implementation of Adiwiyata to have more ceremonial nuances than substantive nuances, including:

Policy bureaucratizationAdiwiyata's assessment is very based on administrative indicators, so schools are stuck in trying to "fill out forms" rather than creating innovations.

Culture of appreciation in educationThe Indonesian education system tends to measure school success from certificates, charters, and formal achievements. Superstitions are not exempt from this logic.

Limited teacher capacityMany teachers have not received in-depth training on the integration of environmental issues in learning. As a result, they prefer the instant practical path.

Lack of school community participationThe Adiwiyata program is often run by small groups (the adiwiyata team), so the participation of all school residents is weak. In fact, participation is the main spirit of the program.

Lack of long-term monitoringAfter schools achieved the title of Adiwiyata, the continuous monitoring mechanism was relatively weak, so many schools stopped innovating.

Critical Implications for Environmental Education

The ceremonialism in Adiwiyata has some serious implications:

Reduction of the meaning of environmental educationEnvironmental education is narrowed down to cosmetic activities, not critical awareness.

Failure to internalize valuesStudents only participate in symbolic activities, but do not internalize ecological attitudes in daily life.

Declining public trustThe public can judge that Adiwiyata is only a competition, not a serious strategy to build an environmental culture.

Potentially counterproductiveIf students see that rewards are more important than awareness, then environmental messages lose credibility.

Reconstruction of the Supernatural Approach

In order for Adiwiyata not to be trapped in ceremonialism, it is necessary to reconstruct approaches, including:

Changing assessment indicatorsFocus not only on school physicality and documents, but more on changing the behavior of students, teachers, and the school community.

In-depth integration in the curriculumEnvironmental issues should be a cross-subject theme, not just an additional extracurricular activity.

Participatory and contextual approachPrograms should actively engage students through real projects (e.g. action research, self-directed waste management, school energy audits).

Continuous monitoringThere must be a post-award monitoring mechanism to keep schools consistent.

Strengthening the capacity of teachersTeachers need to be equipped with ecological literacy and critical learning methodologies in order to be able to instill sustainability values.

The Position of Adiwiyata in Critical Education Discourse

If read through Paulo Freire's perspective, Adiwiyata should be a dialogical educational space that fosters students' critical awareness of ecological issues. However, ceremonialism makes this program tend to lead to a pattern of "banking education"—filling out forms, planting trees during the competition, and then stopping. Thus, an epistemological transformation is needed: Adiwiyata is not just a bureaucratic project, but a school-based socio-ecological movement. This position will return the program to the spirit of liberating critical education, building students as reflective and transformative ecological citizens.

CONCLUSION

The Adiwiyata program as an environmental education policy in Indonesia is actually a strategic step in an effort to build ecological awareness from school age. By integrating the value of sustainability into the curriculum, school management, school community participation, and the physical environment of the school, Adiwiyata has great potential to create a young generation that cares about the environment. Normatively, the four main principles of Adiwiyata—participatory, sustainable, curriculum-based, and environmentally cultured—represent a comprehensive conceptual framework. However, the results of a critical review of the literature show that there is a significant gap between ideality and implementation reality. Many schools that implement Adiwiyata are actually trapped in educational ceremonialism, which is more oriented towards formal symbols, assessments, and rewards than the internalization of ecological values. This phenomenon is in line with Meyer & Rowan's critique of myth and ceremony in institutions, as well as Freire's view of banking-style education that tends to be formalistic.

As a result, although administratively many schools have achieved the title of Adiwiyata, substantive changes in the behavior of school residents are still weak. Environmental education, which is supposed to form

critical awareness, an environmentally friendly lifestyle, and the active participation of the school community, is often displaced by cosmetic practices such as instant greening, cleanliness competitions, or formal documentation when there is an assessment. This indicates that Adiwiyata has not fully functioned as a transformative educational instrument, but rather tends to be a symbolic program to meet bureaucratic indicators. Thus, the main conclusion of this study is that Adiwiyata contains a paradox: on the one hand it offers a visionary environmental education framework, but on the other hand risks getting caught up in ceremonialism if its implementation is not directed at substance. To answer this paradox, there needs to be a reconstruction of the approach so that Adiwiyata emphasizes the transformative dimension more than just administrative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Curriculum Integration Adiwiyata must emphasize the integration of environmental issues in cross-subject learning. Not only in science or geography subjects, but also in language, art, economics, and religious education. Thus, ecological awareness will be formed holistically and not partially. Teachers need to be given pedagogical training to be able to relate environmental issues with the context of students' real lives.

Reorientation of Adiwiyata Assessment The Adiwiyata assessment system should not emphasize too much on administrative or physical aspects (e.g. greening, documents, certificates), but rather on the sustainability of the program and changes in the behavior of school residents. Indicators such as sustainable waste management, student engagement in real action, and school culture change need to be given greater weight than just cosmetic results.

Empowerment of School Citizen Participation The participation of teachers, students, and parents must be expanded not only in the form of involvement during competitions or ceremonial activities, but also in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. The student-centered model can be used so that students are not only objects, but active subjects in the movement to care for the environment.

Critically-Based Transformative Approach Referring to Freire's critical theory, Adiwiyata must be directed to build critical consciousness through dialogue, reflection, and real action. For example, students can be invited to discuss local issues (floods, plastic waste, air pollution) and then be involved in designing solutions. This approach will make environmental education more contextual and meaningful.

Collaboration with Communities and Local Governments In order not to stop at the school level, Adiwiyata needs to establish synergy with the environmental community, local governments, and the business world. This collaboration can strengthen the impact of the program, for example through waste bank programs, urban farming, or energy-saving campaigns. Schools can be centers for environmental innovation in the surrounding community.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation Evaluation of the implementation of Adiwiyata must be carried out periodically by emphasizing the dimension of quality, not quantity. The action research mechanism can be applied by teachers to continue to improve environmental education practices in their respective schools.

Reducing Excessive Bureaucratization Adiwiyata needs to get out of the trap of bureaucratization that places schools only as an object of assessment. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Ministry of Education can design a system that is simpler, flexible, and mentor-based than competitions or competitions.

Environmental Character Development More than just physical activities, Adiwiyata must emphasize the formation of students' ecological character: discipline in managing waste, energy-efficient lifestyle, concern for flora and fauna, and a sense of responsibility for the sustainability of the earth.

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