KOLEKTIF: Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengajaran, dan Pembelajaran
Volume 1 (4), June 2025, 158-173
ISSN: 3063-6949 (Online); ISSN: 3063-637X (Print)
Available online: https://e-journal.alekra.id/index.php/kolektif

A Rhizomatic Approach in Elementary Reading Comprehension Strategies: Encouraging Dynamic Connections with Local Literature

Ismail[1*], Muh. Idham Haliq[2], Muhammad Junaedi Mahyuddin[3], Musdalifah[4], Suarti Djafar[5], Suparman[6]
Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, Indonesia[1,2,3,4,5,6]
Email: ismail@unimen.ac.id[*]

Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of a rhizomatic approach in enhancing reading comprehension through the integration of local literature at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Literacy skills, particularly reading comprehension, are critical for academic success, yet traditional teaching methods often fail to engage students or foster critical thinking. While rhizomatic learning has proven effective in higher education, its application in primary education remains underexplored. This study employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating classroom observations, analysis of students' written responses, and pre-test and post-tests to measure the impact of this approach on student engagement and comprehension. The findings revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension, with students demonstrating greater engagement and the ability to make personal and cultural connections with the texts. These results suggest that the rhizomatic approach, integrated with local literature, can create a more interactive and meaningful learning experience for young learners. The study emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant texts in enhancing literacy skills and provides insights into the potential of non-linear learning frameworks in primary education. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term effects and scalability of this approach.

Keywords: Rhizomatic Learning, Local Literature, Reading Comprehension, Critical Thinking, Literacy Education.

© The Author. Published by CV ALFA EDU KARYA.
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Introduction

In the modern educational landscape, literacy is widely recognized as an essential skill, foundational to academic success and social and personal development. The ability to read and comprehend text is particularly vital at the elementary school level, as it sets the stage for all subsequent learning. Reading comprehension, as a complex cognitive process (Jahangiri et al., 2024; Leu et al., 2011; Snow, 2017), involves decoding words and constructing meaning through interaction with the text. This multifaceted skill requires students to engage actively with the content, connecting prior knowledge with new information, a process essential for deep learning and critical thinking (Mandinach & Abrams, 2022). However, in many educational contexts, particularly in primary education, traditional approaches to teaching reading comprehension often emphasize the passive absorption of information, disregarding the interactive and dynamic nature of the reading process.

Rhizomatic learning, a concept derived from the philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari (2007), offers a radical shift in this approach. Rhizomatic thinking emphasizes non-linear, interconnected, and decentralized learning pathways (Rimban, 2024). Unlike traditional hierarchical models of education, rhizomatic learning allows for flexibility, adaptation, and learner agency, enabling students to make dynamic connections between different ideas and experiences. This approach resonates particularly well with young learners, who benefit from active exploration and interaction with content, allowing them to navigate learning in ways that are more meaningful and relevant to their own lives (Duncum, 2015; Sajjadi, 2014). For example, a student reading *Rantai Makanan* (Food Chain) might connect the story's themes to their family's farming practices, making the learning experience more relatable and impactful.

The application of a rhizomatic approach to elementary reading comprehension strategies is proposed in this study, specifically through the use of local literature. By incorporating culturally relevant texts, the goal is to create a more dynamic and interactive reading experience for elementary school students. Local literature, with its rich cultural heritage and moral lessons, provides an ideal context for the rhizomatic approach, allowing students to engage with the text and connect with their own identities, histories, and communities (Kicha, 2023; Malawi et al., 2017). For instance, stories such as *Air Mata Katak Todang* (The Tears of the Todang Frog) offer themes of environmental conservation, enabling students to discuss and reflect on local issues like water resource management in their villages. This approach fosters the development of reading comprehension as a holistic skill, where students do not merely extract information but construct their own paths of understanding through active engagement with the material.

Despite the recognized importance of reading comprehension, many elementary schools in non-Western settings, including Indonesia, continue to face challenges in fostering effective literacy skills. Traditional pedagogical methods, which often prioritize rote memorization and standardized assessments, limit the ability of students to make meaningful connections with the material. In particular, the use of local literature as a tool for enhancing reading comprehension remains underexplored in many primary school classrooms. SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, located in a rural area of

Sulawesi Selatan, provides a representative example of this issue. Although the school serves a predominantly local community rich in cultural traditions, its curriculum heavily relies on national textbooks and imported literature. Consequently, students often struggle to relate the content to their lived experiences, resulting in disengagement and shallow comprehension.

A significant barrier to incorporating local literature into the curriculum is the lack of teacher training in alternative pedagogical approaches, such as rhizomatic learning, that would allow for the flexible integration of diverse, locally relevant texts. Teachers at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, like many others in rural Indonesian schools, face limited resources and have not been exposed to innovative methods that could foster more dynamic, interactive reading comprehension practices. For instance, while local stories about food security or cultural traditions are familiar to students, these are rarely utilized in classrooms, leaving untapped potential for connecting education to students' cultural and social realities. This results in a passive approach to reading, where students read to extract factual information but lack opportunities to explore deeper meanings or connect the material to their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds.

The solution to these challenges lies in the integration of a rhizomatic approach to literacy, specifically in the context of local literature. Rhizomatic learning, which emphasizes fluid, interconnected learning paths, allows students to engage with texts in a way that encourages exploration, critical thinking, and personal meaning-making. By adopting a rhizomatic approach, educators can move away from rigid, linear reading practices and instead create learning environments where students can make dynamic connections between the material, their own experiences, and the broader world around them. For example, teachers could encourage students to explore themes from *Warisan Budaya* (Cultural Heritage) by discussing how family traditions influence community values, fostering both comprehension and cultural awareness. This approach encourages learners to view reading as a process of discovery rather than a task to complete, fostering deeper engagement and comprehension.

In the case of SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, implementing rhizomatic reading comprehension strategies would involve rethinking how local literature is presented in the classroom. Teachers would be encouraged to move beyond conventional teaching practices and create opportunities for students to engage with texts in a more personalized and meaningful way. This could involve using local stories, folklore, and cultural narratives as part of the curriculum, allowing students to connect with the material on a deeper level. Furthermore, by using a rhizomatic framework, teachers could encourage students to explore different interpretations of the texts, allowing for multiple pathways of understanding that reflect the diversity of perspectives within the classroom.

At SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, the specific implementation of a rhizomatic approach to reading comprehension could begin with teacher professional development focused on innovative literacy practices. Training educators in the principles of rhizomatic learning would equip them with the tools to create flexible, student-centered learning environments. Teachers would be guided to incorporate local literature into their

teaching materials, fostering a stronger connection between the curriculum and students' cultural backgrounds. This would also involve encouraging teachers to use collaborative reading activities, where students can discuss, interpret, and create new meanings from the texts they engage with.

In practice, this could involve activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and creative projects that allow students to explore local stories and connect them to their own lives. For example, after reading a local folk tale, students could be invited to explore the themes of the story through art, drama, or storytelling, encouraging them to express their interpretations in diverse ways. This would create a more interactive and dynamic learning experience, where reading comprehension is not merely about answering questions but about creating connections and developing a deeper understanding of the text.

The concept of rhizomatic learning, first articulated by (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007) has been applied in various educational contexts, from secondary to adult education, to promote a more fluid and connected approach to learning. Recent studies, such as those by Cormier (2008) and Smitka (2012), have explored the use of rhizomatic principles in art and literacy education, highlighting the benefits of non-linear learning paths and the importance of connecting learning to students' lived experiences. These studies suggest that rhizomatic learning can be particularly effective in fostering critical thinking and creativity by allowing students to take ownership of their learning process.

In the context of literacy education, researchers have argued for the use of local literature as a means of bridging the gap between students' cultural backgrounds and the academic curriculum (Peggy Laughlin, 2008; Smitka, 2012). By incorporating locally relevant texts, educators can create more engaging and meaningful literacy experiences, encouraging students to make connections between what they read and their own lives. This approach aligns with the rhizomatic emphasis on interconnectedness and the importance of context in the learning process.

The purpose of this study is to explore how a rhizomatic approach to reading comprehension strategies, using local literature, can enhance literacy outcomes for elementary school students at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how rhizomatic principles can be applied to foster dynamic connections between students and local texts, thus encouraging deeper engagement and critical thinking in reading comprehension. Through the integration of culturally relevant literature, the study seeks to create a more interactive and meaningful learning experience for students, moving beyond traditional, linear approaches to reading instruction.

This research is driven by two main questions. First, in what ways can a rhizomatic approach to reading comprehension, utilizing local literature, enhance engagement and critical thinking among elementary school students at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang? This question aims to explore both the potential advantages and the practical challenges of implementing a rhizomatic approach to literacy education, with a focus on its effects in culturally relevant, local contexts.

The innovative aspect of this study lies in its application of rhizomatic learning specifically within the context of local literature in Indonesian primary education. While much has been written about the general benefits of rhizomatic learning in various educational settings, this study provides a unique contribution by applying these principles to the specific context of elementary reading comprehension. Furthermore, it emphasizes the use of local literature, which has been largely underutilized in many schools in Indonesia, including SD Negeri 161 Enrekang. This approach not only aims to enhance students' literacy skills but also seeks to connect the learning process with students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, offering a more relevant and engaging approach to education.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the impact of a rhizomatic approach on enhancing reading comprehension through local literature in an elementary school setting. This dual-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, offering in-depth qualitative insights alongside quantifiable data on student outcomes.

Rhizomatic Framework

The study was grounded in the Rhizomatic Learning Framework, as articulated by (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007). Rhizomatic learning emphasizes a non-linear, decentralized approach to education, where students actively construct meaning through interactions with content and peers. This framework fosters a flexible, student-centered learning environment that prioritizes dynamic connections between ideas and experiences. Unlike traditional hierarchical models, the rhizomatic framework allows students to explore knowledge paths that are personally relevant and contextually rich.

Integration of Local Literature

A central feature of the study was the integration of culturally relevant local literature into the curriculum. The textbooks were carefully selected to reflect the students' cultural and environmental contexts, ensuring their relevance and resonance with the learners. The materials included: *Jejak Langkah Menuju Keindahan Kebun Anggrek* (The Journey to the Beauty of the Orchid Garden) *(Ismail, 2024a)*, *Petualangan di Awan* (Cloud Technology) *(Ismail, 2024c)*, *Sekolahku Sehat* (Health Schools) (Ismail & Tini, 2024b), *Taman Pangan Stunting* (Stunting Food Park) *(Ismail, 2024e)*, *Pesona Warisan Budaya* (The Charm of Cultural Heritage)*(Ismail, 2024b)*, *Rantai Makanan* (Food Chain) (Ismail, 2024d), *Pangan Lokal* (Local Food Preservation) (Ismail, 2015), and *Air Mata Katak Todang* (The Tears of the Todang Frog) (Ismail & Tini, 2024a).



Figure 1. Local Literature

These textbooks were chosen for their ability to engage students academically while connecting to their personal and cultural experiences. For example, *Taman Pangan Stunting* provided an entry point for discussions on food security and health, while *Warisan Budaya* allowed students to reflect on their family traditions. The integration of local literature aimed to enhance comprehension by making the material more relatable, fostering personal connections, and encouraging critical thinking about cultural contexts (Delgado-Ron & Andrade-Rivas, 2023; Ebe Ann E, 2010; Peggy Laughlin, 2008). The diagram 2 illustrates how the Rhizomatic Framework and the Integration of Local Literature interacted to enhance reading comprehension.

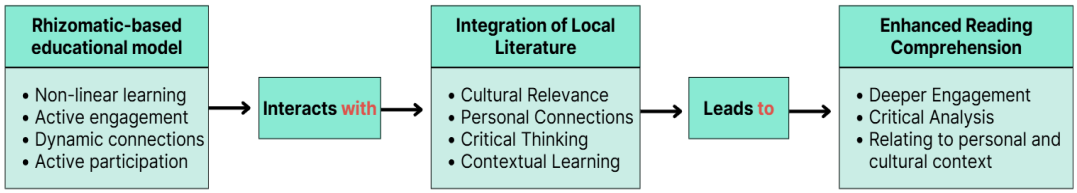


Figure 2. Interaction between the Rhizomatic Framework and Integration of Local Literature in Enhancing Reading Comprehension

The Rhizomatic Framework promotes non-linear learning, active student engagement, and dynamic connections, where students are central participants in constructing meaning. The Integration of Local Literature provides culturally relevant material, enabling students to form personal connections, engage in critical thinking, and relate content to their own life experiences and cultural contexts. The interaction between these two frameworks results in enhanced reading comprehension, where students engage more deeply with texts, analyze them critically and make meaningful connections to their own experiences. This diagram captures how the integration of both frameworks contributes to improving students' comprehension skills.

Research Participants

The study was conducted with a class of 30 Grade 5 students at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, a rural school in Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia. The participants, aged 10–11 years, shared similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making them a culturally homogenous group. This setting was selected to explore how the rhizomatic approach, paired with local literature, could impact students in a rural Indonesian context where exposure to such methodologies is limited.

While the students were familiar with the national curriculum, they had minimal exposure to local literature or non-linear learning strategies that encourage critical thinking and personal engagement. Their teacher, who had experience with traditional reading comprehension methods, was new to implementing rhizomatic strategies. This combination of teacher and student characteristics provided a valuable context for examining how these innovative methods could influence reading comprehension.

Data Collection

Classroom observations were conducted over six weeks to capture qualitative data on student engagement, interaction with texts, and rhizomatic learning behaviors. Observational data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Victoria Clarke & Braun, 2015). Field notes were coded to identify recurring themes such as non-linear thinking, dynamic connections between ideas, and active student participation. For example, students frequently linked story themes to lessons in other subjects, demonstrating the interdisciplinary potential of the rhizomatic approach.

Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests to assess changes in students' reading comprehension skills. The tests included multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay-type questions designed to evaluate students' abilities to recall details, analyze themes, and connect texts to broader contexts. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and standard errors, were used to summarize the results. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the improvements in post-test scores were statistically significant.

Student-written responses were evaluated using a rubric that assessed comprehension, critical thinking, and personal connections. Each rubric category was scored numerically, and the averages were analyzed to identify trends in student performance. For example, students scored highly in connecting texts to their cultural experiences, such as relating themes from *Rantai Makanan* to local farming practices. This analysis provided insights into how the rhizomatic approach influenced the depth and quality of students' engagement with the material.

The methods employed in this study offer valuable insights into the application of the rhizomatic approach in elementary education. By integrating local literature into a flexible, student-centered framework, the study demonstrated how culturally relevant texts could enhance literacy outcomes and foster critical thinking. The mixed-methods design allowed for a holistic exploration of both the qualitative and quantitative impacts of the intervention, contributing to a deeper understanding of its potential to transform traditional literacy practices.

Data Analysis

To comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the rhizomatic approach, a multi-layered analysis was conducted: *Qualitative Analysis*, Observational data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes and themes such as active participation, cultural connections, and interdisciplinary thinking were identified to understand student engagement and learning behaviors. Written responses were qualitatively examined for evidence of critical thinking and personal connections, providing rich insights into how students engaged with the texts.

Quantitative Analysis, pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and standard error). A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the changes in scores were statistically significant, highlighting the impact of the rhizomatic approach on reading comprehension. Rubric scores from written responses were statistically summarized to track improvements in students' ability to comprehend, analyze, and connect the texts to their experiences.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section presents the results of the study, which investigated the impact of a rhizomatic approach to reading comprehension strategies, particularly through the integration of local literature, in an elementary school context. The findings presented below are drawn from multiple sources of data, including classroom observations, teacher interviews, student written responses, and pre-and post-test results. The analysis aims to explore how the rhizomatic approach enhanced student engagement, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills. The results are analyzed in terms of student engagement with local literature, the development of non-linear thinking, and the improvements in reading comprehension, as well as the challenges encountered during the study.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted over six weeks to analyze how students interacted with local literature and how rhizomatic learning principles were applied in the classroom. The observations focused on key aspects such as student engagement, interactions with texts, rhizomatic learning behaviors, and classroom dynamics. These observations provided insights into how the rhizomatic approach facilitated interconnected and non-linear learning processes, aligning with the study's objectives of fostering deeper engagement and critical thinking.

Student Engagement. Students demonstrated notable levels of engagement, particularly when discussing stories embedded in local traditions or cultural practices. For example, during a reading of *Air Mata Katak Todang* (The Tears of the Todang Frog), several students shared personal experiences related to the themes of community and environmental conservation depicted in the story. These narratives not only showcased active verbal participation but also a meaningful connection between the text and students' lived experiences, a hallmark of rhizomatic learning (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007; Lu & Chang, 2022; Pattison, 2014).

Interaction with Texts. The students interacted with the texts through annotations, highlighting culturally significant passages, and making notes that linked story themes to other subjects. For instance, one student connected the concept of food sustainability from *Rantai Makanan* (Food Chain Roles) with a health class discussion on stunting prevention. Such interactions indicated that students were not merely reading but actively analyzing and synthesizing information in non-linear ways (Fullagar et al. (2015); Cormier (2008).

Table 1. Summary of Classroom Observations

Key Area of Focus	Time / Duration	Observer's Notes of Observations
Student Engagement	1 hour	Students raised hands to participate in discussions, sharing personal connections to the stories. Active verbal and non-verbal engagement were observed.
Interaction with Texts	1 hour	Students highlighted passages related to their community, annotating the text with cultural references. Some students also made personal notes connecting the text to their experiences.
Rhizomatic Learning Behaviors	1 hour	Students made connections between themes in the literature and concepts from other subjects, such as environmental sustainability and food security. Unexpected connections were made.
Classroom Dynamics	1 hour	The teacher encouraged open discussion, fostering a non-hierarchical environment. Students led group discussions, sharing multiple interpretations of the text. The teacher guided them to explore various viewpoints.

Rhizomatic Learning Behaviors. The rhizomatic nature of the classroom was evident as students independently explored connections between the literature and broader concepts. In group discussions, students linked local narratives to subjects like environmental science and social studies. For example, after reading *Taman Pangan Stunting* (Community Garden), students collectively explored the implications of food security in their community, integrating knowledge from various disciplines. These behaviors demonstrated the flexibility and interconnectedness central to rhizomatic learning (Jafar Jahani et al., 2023; Sajjadi, 2014).

Classroom Dynamics. The teacher's role evolved to that of a facilitator, promoting a non-hierarchical learning environment. Students often took the lead in discussions, presenting diverse interpretations of texts and engaging in peer-led debates. For example, during a group discussion on *Warisan Budaya* (Cultural Practices), students compared the story's themes to personal family traditions, enriching the dialogue with varied perspectives. This participatory approach empowered students and reflected the study's aim to transition from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (Dillon, 2016; Duncum, 2015).

Student Written Response

The analysis of students' written responses to local literature provided rich insights into their comprehension, critical thinking, and ability to connect texts with their personal and cultural contexts. The results underscore the effectiveness of the rhizomatic approach in fostering deeper literacy skills and enhancing meaningful engagement with culturally relevant material.

Comprehension. The mean score for comprehension was 4.17, indicating a strong understanding of the main themes and concepts in the local literature. Students were able to recall significant details and analyze key ideas presented in the texts. For example, in the story *Air Mata Katak Todang* (The Tears of the Todang Frog), students identified the central theme of environmental conservation and connected it to their community's local efforts to protect water sources. This connection suggests that integrating culturally relevant material makes the content more relatable and memorable, thus enhancing comprehension (Delgado, 2021; Ebe Ann E, 2010). These findings highlight how the rhizomatic approach, with its emphasis on personal relevance, supports the development of foundational reading skills.

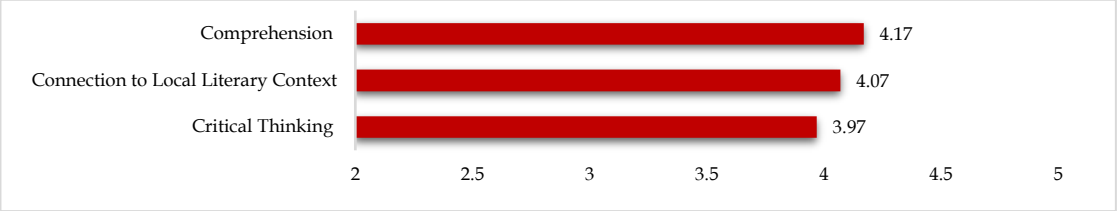


Figure 3. Student Written Response Scores

Critical Thinking. The mean score for critical thinking was 3.97, reflecting the students' ability to engage with the texts at a deeper cognitive level. This involved analyzing, interpreting, and reflecting on the material beyond mere recall. For instance, while reading *Taman Pangan Stunting* (Community Garden), students discussed the broader implications of food sustainability and its relationship to local health initiatives, such as stunting prevention programs. This level of analysis demonstrates the rhizomatic approach's ability to promote exploration and personal connection, fostering a reflective reading process that aligns with prior studies (Duncum, 2015). Students' ability to draw on their lived experiences and integrate them into their understanding of the texts exemplifies the non-linear and interconnected thinking promoted by this framework.

Connection to Local Literary Context. The mean score for students' ability to connect to the local literary context was 4.07, showing that students were adept at relating the stories to their personal lives and cultural backgrounds. This connection is particularly evident in responses to *Warisan Budaya* (Cultural Practices), where students shared their own family traditions and compared them to those depicted in the text. Such reflections not only fostered a sense of cultural identity but also helped students appreciate the values and practices of their community (Gay, 2018). These findings emphasize that culturally relevant literature, when integrated into a rhizomatic framework, encourages students to explore themes and values within their own socio-cultural context, leading to more meaningful and engaged learning experiences.

Students' reading comprehension skills

The analysis of pre-test and post-test results provides compelling evidence of the impact of the rhizomatic approach on students' reading comprehension abilities. The tests, which included multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay-type questions, assessed students' abilities to recall details, analyze themes, and connect the texts to broader cultural or personal contexts.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test scores

Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Pre-Test	58.25	3.70	0.68
Post-Test	74.17	5.98	1.09

The pre-test scores, with a mean of 58.25 (standard deviation: 3.70), reflect students' moderate initial reading comprehension skills. These results served as a baseline, highlighting areas where students required improvement. In contrast, the post-test scores revealed a significant increase, with a mean of 74.17 (standard deviation: 5.98). This improvement underscores the effectiveness of the rhizomatic approach in fostering deeper engagement, critical thinking, and comprehension skills.

For example, students who initially struggled with identifying themes in texts demonstrated marked progress after the intervention. In the pre-test, many students provided surface-level responses to questions about the main ideas in *Taman Pangan Stunting* (Community Garden). However, in the post-test, their responses reflected an ability to analyze the story's implications for local health initiatives and environmental sustainability. This transformation suggests that the rhizomatic framework enabled students to integrate new knowledge with their prior understanding, fostering a more nuanced grasp of the material (Cormier, 2008; Jahangiri et al., 2024).

Enhanced Critical Thinking and Personal Connections. The improvement in test scores was complemented by qualitative evidence of deeper engagement. For instance, students frequently connected the texts to their own experiences and cultural contexts. After reading *Rantai Makanan* (Food Chain Roles), one student linked the narrative to their family's agricultural practices, illustrating a practical application of the story's themes. These connections align with the rhizomatic approach's emphasis on non-linear learning paths, where students draw from diverse sources of knowledge to construct meaning (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007).

Broader Contributions and Context. These findings contribute to a growing body of research on rhizomatic learning, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing elementary students' literacy skills. The integration of culturally relevant local literature not only enriched students' reading comprehension but also fostered critical thinking and a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage. This approach addresses a critical gap in elementary education by aligning literacy instruction with students' lived experiences, making the learning process more meaningful and engaging.

Implications for Elementary Education. The results of this study highlight the potential of rhizomatic learning to transform traditional pedagogical practices in elementary education. By prioritizing culturally relevant texts and flexible, student-centered learning frameworks, educators can create environments where students actively engage with material, think critically, and make meaningful connections. These findings offer practical insights for teachers and curriculum developers seeking to enhance literacy outcomes in diverse educational settings.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a rhizomatic approach to reading comprehension strategies through the integration of local literature at SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, a rural elementary school in Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia. This discussion integrates the findings with the theoretical framework, previous literature, and the broader implications for elementary education, while also incorporating local context and concrete examples to enhance clarity and depth.

The study's findings, derived from classroom observations, student written responses, and pre-and post-test results, reveal the substantial positive impact of the rhizomatic approach on students' literacy skills. Specifically, the rhizomatic framework encouraged deeper engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful connections to students' cultural and personal contexts.

Classroom observations demonstrated high levels of student engagement. Students actively participated in discussions and frequently connected the stories to their personal experiences. For instance, during the reading of *Air Mata Katak Todang* (The Tears of the Todang Frog), students discussed parallels between the story's theme of environmental conservation and efforts in their community to protect water sources. These interactions reflect the principles of rhizomatic learning, which emphasize dynamic, non-linear learning paths and the integration of students' lived experiences into the learning process (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007; Pattison, 2014).

The shift in classroom dynamics from teacher-centered to student-centered was another notable finding. The teacher transitioned into the role of facilitator, enabling students to explore multiple interpretations of the texts. For example, group discussions on *Warisan Budaya* (Cultural Heritage) highlighted diverse perspectives as students compared the story's themes to their own family traditions. This participatory model empowered students and aligned with the rhizomatic emphasis on learner agency and non-hierarchical interaction (Duncum, 2015; Nery-Cura & De Guzman, 2018).

Integration of Local Literature. The integration of culturally relevant local literature proved central to the success of this approach. Stories such as *Rantai Makanan* (Food Chain) and *Taman Pangan Stunting* (Stunting Food Park) allowed students to connect their cultural and social realities with the academic material. For example, after reading *Taman Pangan Stunting*, students discussed the role of community gardens in addressing food security, linking it to lessons from their health class. This approach enhanced not only comprehension but also students' awareness of broader social and environmental issues.

Peggy Laughlin (2008) highlights the importance of local literature in bridging the gap between students' cultural backgrounds and academic content, making learning more meaningful. The high connection scores (mean 4.07) demonstrate how culturally relevant texts encouraged students to engage more deeply with the material and develop a stronger sense of cultural identity.

Critical Thinking and Non-Linear Learning. The rhizomatic approach also fostered critical thinking. The mean critical thinking score of 3.97 reflects students' ability to analyze, interpret, and synthesize ideas. For instance, students linked themes in *Taman Pangan Stunting* to discussions on sustainability and local agricultural practices, illustrating their ability to integrate knowledge from multiple sources. This aligns with research by Duncum (2015), which underscores the role of rhizomatic learning in promoting reflective and flexible thinking.

Pre- and Post-Test Results. The significant improvement in mean scores from 58.25 (pre-test) to 74.17 (post-test) further validates the rhizomatic approach's impact on reading comprehension. This improvement demonstrates that students not only retained information more effectively but also developed the ability to engage with texts on a deeper level. These results are consistent with the findings of (Cormier, 2008) and (Correia et al., 2024), who emphasize the value of non-linear, interconnected learning in enhancing comprehension and retention.

The findings from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how rhizomatic learning can transform elementary literacy practices. By combining culturally relevant texts with a flexible, student-centered framework, this approach addresses a critical gap in traditional literacy instruction. It demonstrates that students engage more meaningfully with material that reflects their own experiences and cultural contexts, fostering both academic and personal growth.

This study also highlights the importance of integrating local literature into elementary education. Such integration not only improves literacy outcomes but also nurtures cultural awareness and identity. In rural and diverse educational settings like SD Negeri 161 Enrekang, these outcomes are particularly significant, as they help students connect their learning to their community and broader societal issues.

While this study provides compelling evidence of the rhizomatic approach's effectiveness, several areas warrant further exploration to enhance its applicability and impact. First, future research should focus on the scalability and generalizability of the approach by replicating the study in diverse educational settings and with larger, more heterogeneous populations to validate the findings across different contexts. Second, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term impact of rhizomatic learning, particularly whether the skills developed through this approach are sustained over time and transferable to other disciplines. Additionally, the role of teacher training in implementing rhizomatic pedagogy effectively should be investigated, as professional development programs could play a crucial role in equipping educators with the tools and strategies necessary for success. Lastly, exploring the broader applications of rhizomatic learning in other subject areas, such as mathematics or science, could provide valuable insights into its interdisciplinary potential and further expand its relevance in contemporary education.

Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of integrating rhizomatic principles with culturally relevant local literature to transform elementary reading comprehension practices. This approach promotes deeper engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful connections to students' personal and cultural contexts by shifting from traditional linear teaching methods to a non-linear, student-centered framework.

The implications of this study are significant for literacy education, particularly in primary school settings. Teachers and curriculum developers must incorporate local literature into teaching practices to foster culturally responsive learning environments. Furthermore, the rhizomatic approach offers a flexible and dynamic framework that can be adapted to other educational contexts, making it a valuable tool for enhancing student-centered learning.

Future research could explore the scalability and long-term impact of this approach in diverse educational settings. Studies involving larger, more heterogeneous populations would provide broader insights into its effectiveness. Additionally, extending the rhizomatic framework to other disciplines beyond reading comprehension may reveal its potential for fostering critical thinking and engagement across various areas of learning.

References

Cormier, D. (2008). Rhizomatic Education: Community as Curriculum. *Innovate*, *4*(5). http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=550

Correia, A., Água, P., & Conceição, V. (2024). AI in Education: a Comparative Study of Rhizomatic and Connectivism Pedagogical Theories. *INTED2024 Proceedings*, *1*, 4548–4555. https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2024.1179

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2007). Introduction: Rhizome: From the book Transatlantic Literary Studies. In *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474470674-039/pdf

Delgado, P. (2021). Culturally relevant literature for k-5 students. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, *9*(1), 35–44. https://www.talejournal.com/index.php/TJLE/article/view/75

Delgado-Ron, J. A., & Andrade-Rivas, F. (2023). Unwanted or Mistimed Pregnancy and Developmental Issues in Ecuadorian Children Aged 3 to 5: A Doubly Robust Estimate Using Data from the National Health and Nutrition Survey 2018. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, *27*(9), 1672–1682. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-023-03713-5

Dillon, M. (2016). Learning happens: Incorporating a rhizomatic perspective into teaching and learning. *Adult Education Research Conference*, 90–95. https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2016/papers/15

Duncum, P. (2015). Transforming Art Education into Visual Culture Education Through Rhizomatic Structures. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, *November*, 47–64.

Ebe Ann E. (2010). Culturally Relevant Texts and Reading Assessment for English Language Learners. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, *50*(3), 193–210. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol50/iss3/5

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Third Edit). Teachers College Press.

Ismail. (2015). *Pangan Lokal*. Unimen Press.

Ismail. (2024a). *Jejak Langkah Menuju Keindahan Kebun Anggrek*. KBM Indonesia. www.penerbitbukumurah.com

Ismail. (2024b). *Pesona Warisan Budaya*. Unimen Press.

Ismail. (2024c). *Petualangan di Awan: Literasi Cloud Untuk Anak*. KBM Indonesia. www.penerbitbukumurah.com

Ismail. (2024d). *Rantai Makanan*. Unimen Press.

Ismail. (2024e). *Taman Pangan Stunting: Membangun Kesehatan dengan Makanan Sehat*. KBM Indonesia. www.penerbitbukumurah.com

Ismail, & Tini. (2024a). *Air Mata Katak Todan*. Unimen Press.

Ismail, & Tini. (2024b). *Sekolahku Sehat*. KBM Indonesia. www.penerbitbukumurah.com

Jafar Jahani, Emarat, A. D., Marzooqi, R., & Sarvestani, M. S. (2023). Rhizomatic-based educational model and its effect on creative thinking. *The Journal of New Thoughts on Education*, *19*(2), 7–33. https://doi.org/10.22051/jontoe.2021.25369.2593

Jahangiri, E., Mahdizadeh, A., Esmaeilzadeh, Z., & Araghieh, A. (2024). Identification of Components and Indicators of Rhizomatic Knowledge-Based Curriculum in Elementary School. *Sociology of Education*, *10*(2), 66–77.

Kicha, L. (2023). A Systematic Review: Local Literature in Integrated Skills for English Teaching. *Journal of English Language Teaching, Literature and Culture*, *2*(1), 59–66. https://doi.org/10.53682/jeltec.v2i1.6494

Leu, D. J., McVerry, J. G., O'Byrne, W. I., Kiili, C., Everett-Cacopardo, L. Z. H., Kennedy, C., & Forzani, E. (2011). The New Literacies of Online Reading Comprehension: Expanding the Literacy and Learning Curriculum. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *55*(1), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1598/JA

Lu, L., & Chang, H. M. (2022). Rhizomatic Encounters With Inter/Transmedia Art: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching Experiential Contemporary Art. *Studies in Art Education*, *63*(1), 9–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.2007726

Malawi, I., Tryanasari, D., & Kartikasari, A. (2017). Using Local Literature as Learning Literacy. *Proceeding International Seminar of Primary Education*, *1*, 47–52.

Mandinach, E. B., & Abrams, L. M. (2022). Data Literacy and Learning Analytics. *The Handbook of Learning Analytics*, 196–204. https://doi.org/10.18608/hla22.019

Pattison, H. D. A. (2014). *Rethinking Learning to Read: The Challenge from Children Educated at Home* [PhD Thesis]. University of Birmingham.

Peggy Laughlin. (2008). Destination Literacy: A Service Learning, Culturally Responsive Literacy Project. *The American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting*.

Rimban, E. L. (2024). Rhizomatic Pedagogy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. *Available at SSRN 4734793*.

Sajjadi, S. M. (2014). Can Religious Education be Rhizomatic? *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, *19*(1), 42–47. https://doi.org/10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2014.19.1.11424

Smitka, J. A. M. (2012). Rhizomatic explorations in curriculum. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *58*(2), 185–197. https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/ajer.v58i2.55586

Snow, C. (2017). *Reading for understanding : toward a research and development program in reading comprehension*. Rand Corporation. https://doi.org/10.1044/leader.ov.22102017.np