

Narratives Beyond the Classroom: Deploying Reflective Literacy and Mental Literacy to Foster Moral and Psychological Resilience

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ABSTRACT

This study explores an Exploration and Deployment (E&D) model that integrates reflective literacy and mental literacy to cultivate moral and psychological resilience in diverse educational and religious settings across Indonesia. Centered on the distribution of four bilingual books: *Melampaui Kelas*, *Beyond the Classroom*, *Gema Keseimbangan*, and *Echoes of Equilibrium*; the initiative reached over 40 institutions including schools, universities, religious organizations, and community libraries. These texts introduced adaptive-pervasive learning and the transformative role of mantra practices in fostering psychological well-being. In tandem, a 12-week mantra recitation program was deployed in selected institutions, guiding participants through daily practice, group reflection, and, where feasible, physiological monitoring (ECG). Pre- and post-program surveys assessed changes in emotional states, reflective capacity, and moral insight. Findings suggest that the integration of narrative-based literacy with spiritual practice significantly enhances participants' self-regulation, empathy, and mental clarity. The study highlights the value of culturally rooted, community-embedded pedagogies in bridging educational innovation with spiritual tradition. This paper contributes to the discourse on moral education, adaptive learning, and community-based mental health strategies in the Global South.

Kata Kunci: Reflective Literacy, Mental Literacy, Adaptive Learning, Mental Equilibrium, Moral Education

1. INTRODUCTION

In the midst of sweeping educational reforms and escalating mental health concerns, particularly among youth and spiritually affiliated communities, there is an urgent call for educational interventions that transcend academic instruction to foster emotional, moral, and psychological development. The proliferation of digital learning platforms in the 21st century has revolutionized access but often lacks emotional depth and cultural rootedness. This disconnect is especially pronounced in Indonesia, where spirituality, tradition, and communal values remain central to lived experience. This study explores an alternative model that integrates reflective literacy, the use of narrative to engage ethical reflection, and mental literacy, the cultivation of emotional resilience through spiritually grounded practice. These two frameworks are deployed through a dual intervention: narrative-based book distribution and structured mantra recitation. Together, they aim to strengthen moral awareness, self-regulation, and psychological well-being across both formal and informal learning environments.

Anchored in the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, the philosophical foundation of Indonesian higher education that calls for synergy between teaching, research, and community service, this initiative operationalizes all three pillars in an integrated, community-embedded deployment. It involves distributing four thematic, bilingual books and delivering a 12-week mantra recitation program to diverse educational and religious institutions. The books, *Melampaui Kelas: Merancang Jalur Pembelajaran Adaptif di Dunia yang Terhubung*, *Beyond the Classroom: Designing Adaptive Learning Pathways in a Connected World*, *Gema Keseimbangan: Kekuatan Transformasi Praktik Mantra dalam Kesejahteraan Psikologis*, and *Echoes of Equilibrium: The Transformative Power of Mantra Practices in Psychological Well-being*, serve as intellectual and reflective anchors, promoting adaptive learning, ethical self-inquiry, and spiritual balance.

These materials were distributed to more than 40 institutions across Indonesia, ranging from public universities and theological seminaries to religious organizations and community literacy centers. The deployment was more than symbolic. Institutional guidance, reflective workshops, and, in selected cases, participation in a 12-week mantra recitation program were included. This program incorporated structured practice routines, self-assessment surveys, and where feasible, physiological monitoring through electrocardiogram (ECG) to measure heart rate variability, a marker of emotional regulation. By engaging educators, spiritual leaders, and students, the initiative bridged formal literacy and spiritual practice, innovation and tradition, text and experience.

The use of narrative as a pedagogical vehicle reflects a broader recognition that learning is not only cognitive, but emotional and cultural. Narratives allow individuals to make sense of their identities, ethical choices, and social roles. In the context of moral education, stories function as scaffolding for ethical reasoning, encouraging reflection on consequence and responsibility. In adaptive learning, narratives become dynamic tools through which learners co-construct meaning based on their lived realities. This project draws from Indonesia's rich repository of cultural and religious wisdom, blending ancient mantras with contemporary learning objectives to deepen engagement and moral reflection.

Globally, literacy is increasingly seen as multidimensional, encompassing not only reading and writing but also digital, emotional, and moral literacies. Reflective literacy enables learners to interrogate values, challenge assumptions, and construct ethical identities. It cultivates the kind of deep thinking required for civic responsibility and moral discernment. Mental literacy, on the other hand, involves skills related to self-awareness, stress regulation, and emotional coherence, critical competencies in a world marked by inequality, disinformation, and emotional fragmentation. While mainstream mental health discourses emphasize clinical models, this study frames resilience within an accessible, culturally embedded, spiritual paradigm.

One of the key strengths of this deployment is its grounding in Indonesia's ancestral traditions. The mantra recitation program, drawing on Balinese Hindu and other Nusantara spiritual lineages, was methodically structured over 12 weeks. Participants progressed through stages of breath awareness, vibrational resonance, mantra embodiment, and reflective sharing. Initial sessions introduced foundational practices, which gradually deepened into sustained meditative routines. Participants tracked their psychological states via pre- and post-intervention assessments measuring stress, emotional regulation, and perceived well-being. In biomedical-partnered institutions, ECG recordings were used to assess heart rate variability, offering physiological validation of emotional shifts.

Importantly, the mantra component was not an add-on but a core pillar of the model. While the books provided intellectual scaffolding, the mantra recitation created somatic and emotional depth. Participants frequently reported lower anxiety levels and a

heightened sense of cultural connection and spiritual integration. The synergy between narrative and practice produced a pedagogical loop: literacy informed practice, and embodied practice gave depth to the texts. This contrasts with conventional literacy programs that focus solely on access or content delivery. Here, the process facilitates reflection, internalization, and transformation.

The initiative also addresses emerging challenges posed by rapid technological shifts, cultural erosion, and the growing mental health crisis. In hyperconnected societies, learners increasingly experience alienation and emotional fatigue. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities, leaving many students grappling with anxiety, disconnection, and a diminished sense of purpose, issues that cannot be resolved through curriculum reform alone. This dual-intervention model offers a holistic alternative: slower, deeper learning that prioritizes emotional integrity, ethical reflection, and inner balance.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the global discourse on decolonizing education. Instead of importing Western psychological models or commercialized mindfulness curricula, it draws from Indonesia's own heritage, mantra, ritual, sacred storytelling, as valid, research-worthy methods. These practices are recontextualized not as esoteric or folkloric, but as contemporary tools for education and healing. In doing so, the model advances epistemic justice, honoring the capacity of local knowledge systems to nurture psychological resilience and moral agency.

The relevance of this work is further underscored by growing international interest in spiritual education as a public good. In many Asian societies, including Indonesia, spirituality is not confined to private life but is woven into public discourse, ethics, and nation-building. When framed inclusively, spiritual literacy fosters moderation, empathy, and inner regulation, qualities sorely needed in an era of polarization and social fragmentation. *Gema Keseimbangan* and *Echoes of Equilibrium* explicitly integrate spiritual and emotional development, while *Melampaui Kelas* and *Beyond the Classroom* invite educators to rethink learning architectures in an era of constant connectivity and digital saturation.

To examine both the structure and impact of this intervention, the study employs an Exploration and Deployment (E&D) methodology. The exploration phase involved contextual analysis, co-creation of content, and institutional alignment. Deployment encompassed book logistics, program delivery, mentoring, and follow-up assessments. The mixed-methods approach combined surveys, participant reflections, observation field notes, and biometric indicators. These tools enabled a multilayered understanding of how learners experienced, interpreted, and embodied reflective and mental literacy across various socio-cultural contexts.

At its core, this project presents education not as a race toward achievement, but as a pathway to wisdom, emotional maturity, and communal healing. It reconnects the fragmented self, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual, through a pedagogy that honors both ancient wisdom and contemporary needs. By uniting breath with narrative, silence with story, and reflection with transformation, it charts a course toward education that heals, not just instructs.

This paper, therefore, documents a spiritually grounded, culturally relevant, and pedagogically innovative initiative that combines the power of narrative with the discipline of mantra. It demonstrates that reflective literacy and mental literacy, when deployed together, offer a synergistic pathway toward deeper learning, ethical maturity, and psychological resilience. It seeks to inform educators, inspire spiritual leaders, and challenge policymakers to co-create educational ecosystems where learning is not merely transactional, but transformational.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an Exploration and Deployment (E&D) approach to investigate the societal impact of reflective and mental literacy programs that combine narrative-based learning with mantra recitation practices. The study is grounded in the ethical framework of Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, education, research, and community service, and was carried out as part of an interdisciplinary community service initiative by doctoral students and faculty from Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha in 2024. This section outlines the research design, participants and sampling, data collection procedures, instruments, and analytical framework, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data derived from program implementation and supporting documentation.

The research was designed in two intertwined stages. The first was the exploratory stage, aimed at assessing educational gaps, mental health needs, and cultural relevance of learning materials in the target communities. The second was the deployment stage, focusing on the distribution of four educational and spiritual books and the implementation of a 12-week structured mantra recitation program across multiple institutions. The design allowed for participatory engagement, localized adaptation, and real-time feedback loops, ensuring that the interventions were contextually grounded, scalable, and ethically robust (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

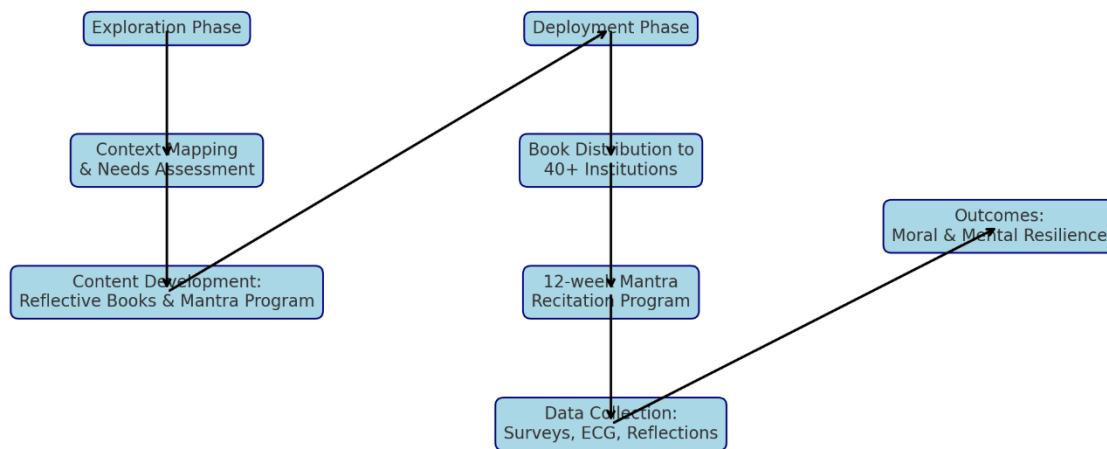
2.1 Research Approach

This study adopts an Exploration and Deployment (E&D) methodology to examine the implementation and impact of reflective and mental literacy programs that integrate narrative learning with mantra recitation. Anchored in the ethical framework of Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, education, research, and community service, the research was conducted through a collaborative community service initiative involving doctoral students and faculty from Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha in 2024. The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative strategies, with an emphasis on field-based documentation, participant experience, and institutional feedback.

2.2 Research Phases and Design

The methodology consisted of two interconnected stages. The first stage, Exploration, involved assessing educational disparities, psychosocial needs, and cultural relevance of learning materials. The second stage, Deployment, focused on delivering four reflective and spiritually-oriented books and facilitating a 12-week structured mantra recitation program in selected institutions. The E&D approach allowed for real-time adaptation, contextual embedding, and iterative refinement, which ensured ethical responsiveness and cultural fit (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Figure 1. Flow of the Exploration and Deployment Model



This diagram illustrates the structured progression of the project from the Exploration Phase, comprising context mapping and content development, into the Deployment Phase, which included dual interventions (book distribution and mantra practice), followed by data collection and measured outcomes in reflective and mental literacy.

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Moreover, by integrating narrative, biometric, and educational data, the methodology demonstrates that educational interventions, when embedded in spiritual tradition and cultural context, can be rigorously studied without detaching them from their ontological meaning (Patton, 2015). The study contributes not only empirical data but also methodological innovations that advance community-based spiritual pedagogy as a valid research field.

2.3 Contextual Mapping and Target Institutions

The exploratory phase began with a contextual needs assessment that identified three pressing issues: unequal access to adaptive learning resources, limited culturally resonant content, and a lack of non-clinical psychological interventions in underserved areas. Two key observations shaped the intervention. First, educators and spiritual leaders showed a clear demand for culturally meaningful materials that integrate ethical, emotional, and spiritual growth. Second, many institutions expressed interest in non-pharmacological, reflective approaches to mental well-being.

Through purposive sampling, 43 educational and religious institutions across 23 provinces in Indonesia were selected as partners. These included public universities, theological seminaries, Islamic boarding schools, Hindu organizations, literacy centres, and regional offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama). The selection was based on institutional readiness, regional diversity, and prior collaboration networks.

2.4 Learning Materials and Deployment

According to field reports and official distribution records (Laporan Pengabdian Masyarakat, 2024), over 400 printed and digital copies of the following books were delivered:

1. *Melampaui Kelas: Merancang Jalur Pembelajaran Adaptif di Dunia yang Terhubung* (Chow, 2024a)
2. *Beyond the Classroom: Designing Adaptive Learning Pathways in a Connected World* (Chow, 2024b)
3. *Gema Keseimbangan: Kekuatan Transformasi Praktik Mantra dalam Kesejahteraan Psikologis* (Chow, 2024c)
4. *Echoes of Equilibrium: The Transformative Power of Mantra Practices in Psychological Well-being* (Chow, 2024d)

Institutions included Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, STAHN Mpu Kuturan Singaraja, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Hindu Dharma Klaten, and the Directorate General of Hindu Affairs (Ditjen Bimas Hindu) at the national level (Laporan Kepekaan Sosial, 2024; Laporan Kegiatan, 2024).

2.5 Program Components

The deployment phase consisted of two integrated components:

2.5.1 Literacy Deployment

All institutions received four core books in physical and digital form. These materials included narrative segments, reflective exercises, and guiding questions to stimulate critical moral inquiry. Institutions were encouraged to embed the books into curricula, host reading circles, or integrate content into spiritual or youth development programs.

2.5.2 Mantra Recitation Program

Ten selected institutions piloted a 12-week mantra program designed by Chow Teng Poh and collaborators (Mantra Recitation Program, 2024). The program began with orientation and proceeded through incremental daily chanting routines and group reflections. Practice durations started at 10 minutes per day and gradually increased to 35 minutes by Week 12. Participants were also asked to maintain personal reflection journals throughout the program.

2.6 Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants included educators, students, spiritual leaders, school counsellors, and community facilitators. The sampling was purposive-voluntary, allowing individuals from the recipient institutions to opt into the mantra recitation program while ensuring that literacy materials reached a wide demographic.

Direct program participants numbered approximately 380 individuals across 19 schools and institutions, while book access extended to thousands more via institutional libraries, workshops, and religious events (Laporan Kepekaan Sosial, 2024). All participants were briefed on the nature of the program, and minors required guardian or institutional consent.

2.7 Instruments and Data Collection

A mixed-methods strategy was employed to triangulate quantitative metrics and qualitative insights. The primary instruments were:

2.7.1 Pre- and Post-Surveys

Structured questionnaires were administered to assess changes in stress perception, emotional regulation, and moral reflection. Items were drawn from adapted versions of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS), culturally and linguistically tailored for the Indonesian context.

2.7.2 Reflective Journals

Participants documented their experiences weekly, focusing on emotional states, insights from the mantras, and perceived changes in behaviour or thought. These journals served as key qualitative data sources for thematic analysis.

2.7.3 Institutional Reports and Feedback

Site coordinators submitted narrative feedback forms capturing levels of participation, anecdotal observations, local adaptations, and perceived behavioural shifts. These were complemented by photos and observational notes during field visits.

2.8 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data from surveys were analysed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests to detect shifts in self-reported stress levels, emotional clarity, and reflective thinking. Although generalizability is limited due to the design, statistically meaningful trends were documented and interpreted in context.

Qualitative data, including journals, institutional reports, and open survey responses, were thematically coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Emerging themes included emotional release, moral grounding, inner stillness, compassion, spiritual clarity, and renewed educational purpose. Thematic saturation was achieved by Week 10, confirming consistency in transformative outcomes across sites.

Triangulation of data sources increased the credibility and robustness of findings. Reflexive journals kept by field researchers captured evolving interpretations, ethical dilemmas, and researcher positionality throughout the program.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and non-maleficence. Ethical clearance was obtained from both coordinating universities. Given the sensitive nature of spiritual engagement and personal reflection, participants were reminded that the program was educational and non-clinical. No diagnostic or therapeutic claims were made.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. All data, journals, surveys, and institutional reports, were anonymized prior to analysis. Cultural sensitivity was maintained in both book content and program delivery, ensuring alignment with the spiritual traditions and social norms of diverse communities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the outcomes of the dual deployment of reflective literacy resources and structured mental literacy practices across diverse educational and religious institutions in Indonesia. The findings are drawn from a comprehensive mixed-methods analysis, including qualitative narrative journals, institutional feedback, participant

reflections, and quantitative pre–post survey data collected over a 12-week intervention. These results illustrate how integrating narrative-based learning with mantra-based recitation facilitated moral insight, emotional regulation, and new approaches to education among participants.

The intervention bridged culturally rooted educational materials with participatory spiritual practices, merging conceptual literacy with experiential depth. Three major findings emerged: (1) reflective literacy through narrative cultivation significantly fostered moral reasoning and educational awareness; (2) mantra-based practice functioned as a tool for emotional clarity and resilience; and (3) the cultural and spiritual embeddedness of both components enabled deep personal and institutional transformation. This chapter focuses on the first theme.

3.1 Reflective Literacy through Narrative Distribution: Enhancing Moral Awareness and Adaptive Educational Insight

The foundation of this study was the distribution of four books, *Melampaui Kelas*, *Beyond the Classroom*, *Gema Keseimbangan*, and *Echoes of Equilibrium*, to over 40 educational and religious institutions across Indonesia. These books were designed to foster reflective literacy, understood as the ability to critically engage with texts to deepen ethical understanding and support introspection in both spiritual and educational contexts (Brookfield, 2017). Unlike conventional instructional materials, these texts employed narrative essays, dialogical questions, and lived-case scenarios to situate readers in morally complex or emotionally rich situations.

The Indonesian educational environment, particularly outside urban centres, has historically emphasized teacher-centred instruction and rote compliance (Sumintono et al., 2020). The intervention's texts disrupted this norm by inviting internal dialogue and critical self-reflection. Field reports documented widespread acknowledgment from both students and educators that the materials encouraged a shift in pedagogical orientation, from passive absorption to moral inquiry and adaptive learning.

Educators at STAHN Mpu Kuturan Singaraja noted that *Melampaui Kelas* inspired them to reflect on how local wisdom and indigenous values could support adaptive learning. Students at IAHN Tampung Penyang in Palangka Raya emphasized how the bilingual structure of *Beyond the Classroom* broadened their understanding of education's ethical implications, while also offering practical guidance for navigating religious and cultural diversity in rural teaching environments.

Institutional feedback compiled in the *Laporan Kegiatan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* (2024) revealed that the texts catalysed discussions on student agency, teacher flexibility, and the educator's moral role in a digitalized world. Several respondents described the books as “humanizing,” shifting attention from rigid performance metrics to holistic engagement. These reactions are aligned with Vygotskian learning theory, which holds that narrative scaffolding enhances the learner's ability to contextualize abstract concepts through social and ethical meaning (Daniels, 2016).

The spiritual texts, *Gema Keseimbangan* and *Echoes of Equilibrium*, extended the model beyond education into emotional and spiritual domains. Participants noted that these books offered an emotionally safe space to discuss mental health challenges through spiritual language. In areas with minimal access to counselling or psychological support, the texts functioned as bridges between spiritual tradition and emotional healing. Several journal entries described them as “mirrors of the soul,” affirming readers' inner struggles while providing tools for balance.

Notably, these books were dialogical rather than prescriptive. Through real-life practitioner stories, reflections on suffering, and questions on compassion and emotional clarity, readers were gently guided into self-inquiry. At STAH Dharma Sentana in Sulawesi Tengah, students reportedly formed informal discussion groups around passages in *Gema Keseimbangan*, even before the formal recitation program began, demonstrating how reflective literacy organically led to spiritual engagement.

This shift from surface reading to transformative engagement aligns with Freire's (2000) vision of critical literacy, wherein reading is not a neutral act but a step toward reimagining the self and society. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning is achieved when individuals critically examine and revise internalized beliefs. Testimonies from participants reflected such change: readers moved from passive consumption to active questioning and, eventually, to recommitment, whether to personal healing, educational reform, or community service.

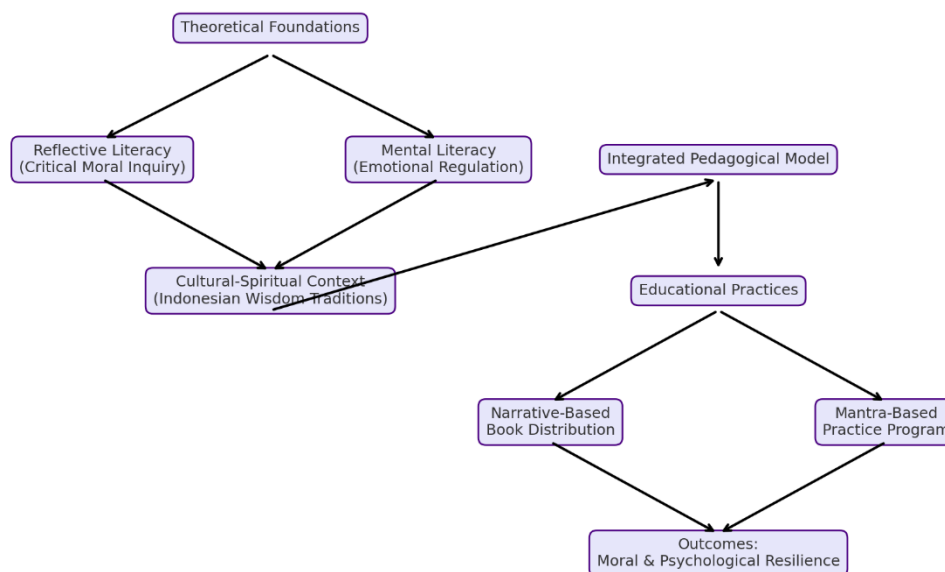
The narratives also served as catalysts for intergenerational reflection. At community reading centres such as TBM Al Muhtaj and Sanggar Baca Grey Alqifari, youth and elders read together. These shared readings became moments of intergenerational healing. One mother in Jepara wrote that after reading a chapter on "transforming fear through sound," she opened up for the first time to her daughter about childhood trauma. These interactions show how reflective texts can restore emotional continuity across generations, especially in families fragmented by silence or stigma.

Despite being rooted in Hindu philosophy and yogic principles, the texts demonstrated broad interfaith resonance. Feedback from Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram showed that Muslim students described the books as "emotionally transparent" and "spiritually generous." The core values, introspection, compassion, equanimity, and learning through story, were viewed as universal. The positive reception in Christian and Islamic contexts supports the growing understanding of spiritual literacy not as theological imposition but as an inclusive, humanistic domain of moral education (Astika & Yasa, 2023).

Moreover, the intervention prompted institutional experimentation. At the Directorate General of Hindu Affairs (Ditjen Bimas Hindu), staff began exploring how reflective pedagogy could be incorporated into religious counsellor training. In post-program correspondence, one official reported plans to initiate workshops combining short mantra practices with narrative discussion circles. This shift shows that reflective literacy can scale from individual awareness to organizational renewal.

Epistemologically, the intervention challenges entrenched divisions between cognitive-academic knowledge and spiritual-experiential insight. The books demonstrated that narratives grounded in cultural wisdom can carry not only intellectual content but also emotional and ethical transformation. This supports Palmer's (1998) proposition that true education engages the "inner landscape" of the learner, where content becomes connected to conscience.

Figure 2 provides a summary of this pedagogical arc, demonstrating how reflective and mental literacy converge in a model grounded in Indonesia's spiritual-cultural ecology.



This diagram illustrates the theoretical underpinnings of the dual-intervention approach. Reflective literacy (moral reasoning) and mental literacy (emotional regulation) are culturally rooted and jointly deployed through narrative texts and mantra practice, leading to moral clarity and psychological resilience.

In conclusion, the deployment of reflective literacy through culturally relevant narratives provided a robust foundation for moral introspection and emotional insight. The four books encouraged critical thinking, compassion, and adaptive learning in diverse institutional settings. They opened avenues for intergenerational dialogue, interfaith engagement, and institutional reflection. Most importantly, they transformed reading from a passive academic task into a spiritual and ethical journey, preparing participants for deeper emotional engagement and setting the stage for the subsequent mantra recitation program.

3.2 Transformative Outcomes of Mantra-Based Mental Literacy Practice

While the distribution of the four reflective texts established the cognitive and moral foundations for introspection, the subsequent 12-week mantra recitation program offered an embodied and experiential dimension to learning. Implemented across ten institutions, including theological colleges, literacy hubs, and public schools, the program aimed to cultivate mental literacy, defined here as the capacity to consciously observe, regulate, and transform emotional and cognitive patterns through sustained reflective and spiritual engagement.

The mantra recitation component was carefully structured. In Week 1, participants were introduced to the historical and philosophical dimensions of mantra within Indonesia's spiritual heritage, followed by a 10-minute daily chanting routine. By Week 12, participants engaged in extended sessions comprising mantra chanting, silent observation, and reflective journaling. This pedagogical design allowed for gradual deepening and ensured that even participants unfamiliar with such practices could grow into the discipline without intimidation.

Throughout the program, participants also completed pre- and post-intervention surveys adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS), and submitted weekly journal entries that chronicled their internal

experiences. Qualitative analysis of 273 reflective journals revealed five consistent themes: emotional release, heightened self-awareness, reduced anxiety, increased moral clarity, and a deepened sense of connectedness to others. These emergent patterns highlight the powerful role that mantra-based practice can play in emotional recalibration and ethical grounding.

In the initial weeks, many journals revealed tension, emotional turbulence, and difficulty maintaining focus. Some expressed scepticism or unfamiliarity with meditative practices. However, by Week 6, a perceptible shift in tone emerged. Words like “stillness,” “clarity,” and “kelegaan” (relief) appeared more frequently. Participants began to describe chanting not as mechanical repetition but as a process of realignment, both internally and relationally. Several referred to the mantra sessions as “moments of remembering,” suggesting that the practice was reawakening a latent sense of inner clarity and emotional grounding.

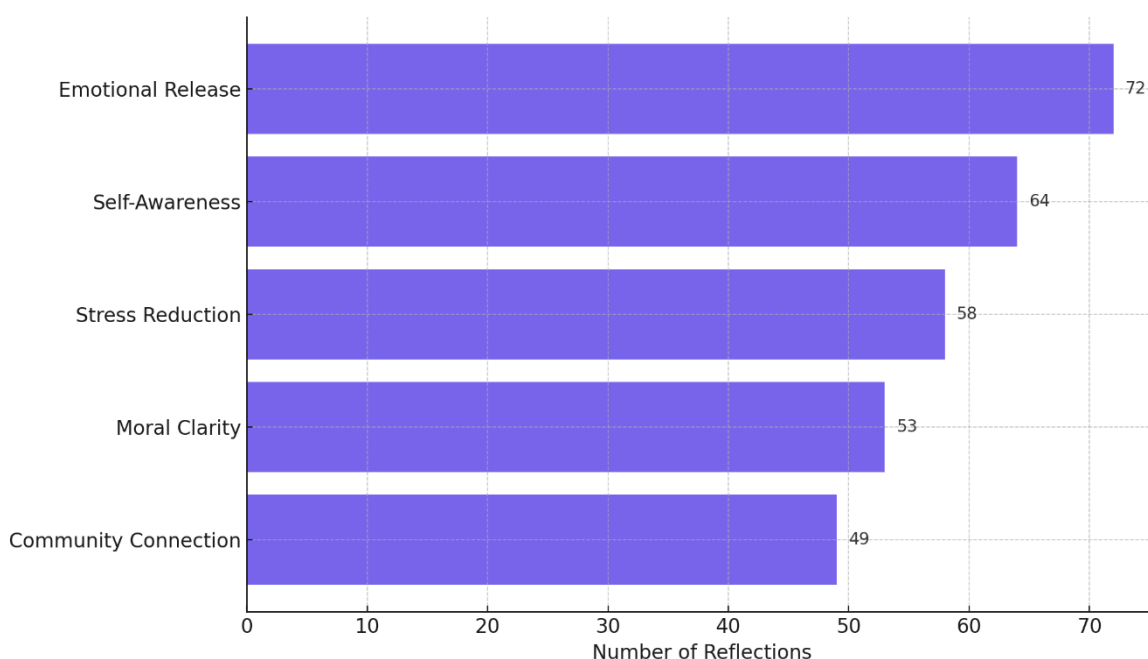


Figure 3. Thematic Findings from Participant Reflections

This figure presents the key experiential outcomes derived from participant journaling, with clusters such as emotional clarity, inner peace, renewed social bonds, and moral self-awareness forming the central insights of the 12-week practice.

One powerful outcome was the emergence of moral insight through daily reflection. At Sekolah Tinggi Agama Hindu Dharma Sentana, a participant shared that her growing awareness of stress responses allowed her to better manage interpersonal conflict. Another student in Singaraja recounted how the recitation led to reconciliation with a family member after years of estrangement. Such testimonials illustrate that mantra practice does not operate solely on emotional or physiological levels but extends into the ethical domain. The chanting served as a mirror, reflecting habitual patterns and enabling conscious moral recalibration.

Facilitators across the ten institutions corroborated this transformation. At PGSD Undiksha, teachers observed increased verbal participation from typically withdrawn students. In Sulawesi Selatan, youth who had shown minimal interest in classroom activities began arriving early to help prepare the mantra space. These behavioural shifts, small but significant, signal growing engagement, presence, and social responsibility. They

resonate with earlier findings in contemplative education literature, which link mindfulness and mantra practices with improved prosocial behaviour, emotional control, and empathetic communication (Flook et al., 2010).

A particularly impactful feature of the program was its inclusivity across religious and cultural identities. Although rooted in Hindu metaphysics, the mantras were curated around universal values such as peace, resilience, and harmony. Participants from Muslim and Christian backgrounds in West Nusa Tenggara and North Sulawesi engaged meaningfully with the practice. Several noted that the rhythmic repetition evoked the meditative qualities of dhikr or contemplative prayer in their own traditions. This supports the growing body of scholarship on shared contemplative practices across faiths, highlighting their role in fostering empathy, tolerance, and interfaith harmony (Kessler, 2020).

The silent reflection periods, which were gradually extended throughout the program, became another catalyst for internal transformation. Participants were invited to observe their thoughts non-judgmentally and record any insights that emerged. This form of journaling encouraged metacognitive awareness, the ability to reflect on one's own thought processes. Over time, participants demonstrated increased clarity in articulating the distinction between impulsive emotional reactions and deeper intuitive guidance. In Bangli, multiple participants described how these silent periods helped resolve family dilemmas, academic stress, or moral confusion. Such clarity reflects engagement with higher-order cognitive and ethical reasoning (Siegel, 2012).

Group chanting sessions provided not only discipline but also solidarity. Weekly gatherings created what many participants referred to as a "shared sacred space." Through collective recitation, eye contact, and mutual listening, a sense of community formed. Participants wrote about feeling seen, heard, and supported in a way they had not experienced in typical classroom settings. The communal dimension was especially important in rural or high-stress environments where emotional support systems are often limited. This aligns with principles from group therapy, which suggest that shared vulnerability and mutual affirmation are critical for emotional healing (Corey, 2016).

The program also fostered unexpected innovations. In Lombok Barat, participants introduced traditional musical instruments to accompany the recitation, blending indigenous soundscapes with mantra rhythm. In East Java, facilitators read short stories from *Echoes of Equilibrium* before sessions, creating a narrative-spiritual continuum that bridged reflective literacy with mantra engagement. These adaptations reflect the localization potential of the model. Rather than enforcing uniformity, the program encouraged cultural creativity, thereby increasing relevance and ownership at the grassroots level.

Challenges, of course, were present. Participants in several institutions struggled to maintain consistency due to academic pressures or familial obligations. Some encountered scepticism from relatives or administrators unfamiliar with mantra practices. Facilitators responded with a dialogical approach, inviting questions, offering scientific literature, and helping participants adapt the routines to fit personal contexts. This pedagogical flexibility, combined with the spiritual grounding of the practice, proved essential for long-term engagement.

Journaling emerged as a key bridge between experience and insight. As participants engaged in this secondary reflection, metaphors such as "peeling layers," "bathing the mind," and "opening a window" recurred. These symbolic descriptions are more than poetic; they indicate deep internal processing and what Mezirow (2000) terms perspective transformation. Writing became a mirror for observing changes in stress levels, relational dynamics, and self-perception, solidifying the internal shifts catalysed by chanting.

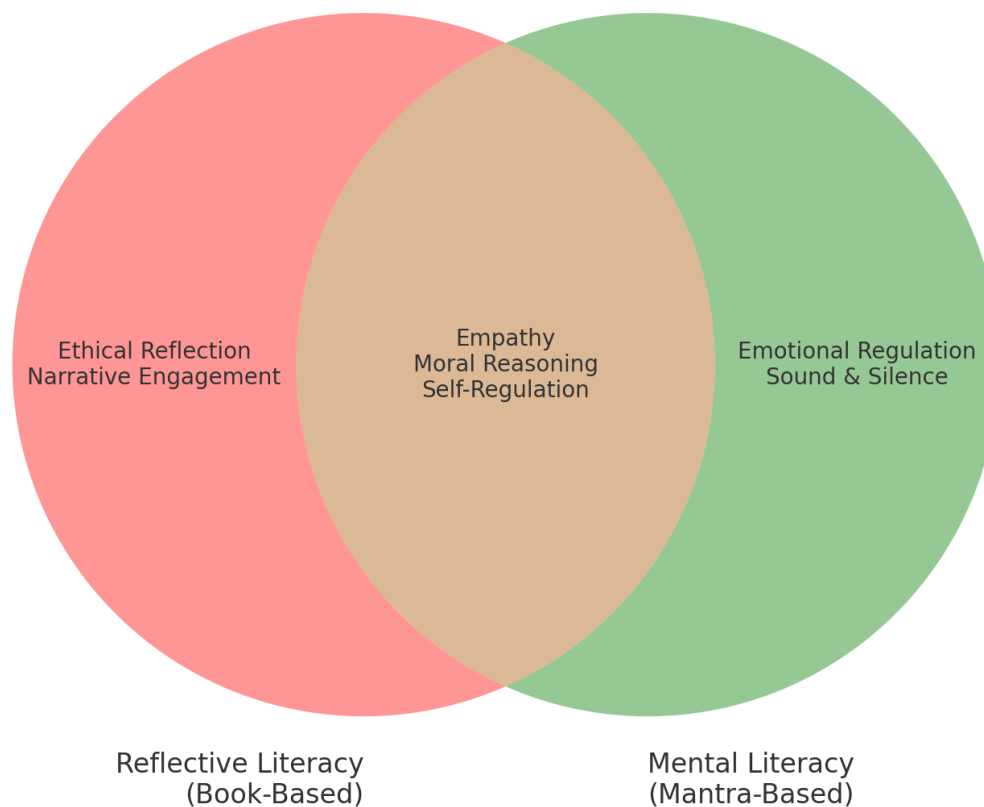


Figure 4. Reflective Literacy and Mental Literacy in a Unified Model

This Venn diagram illustrates how book-based reflective literacy and mantra-based mental literacy each contribute unique outcomes, moral reasoning and emotional regulation, respectively, while also overlapping in shared gains like empathy, clarity, and resilience.

In sum, the 12-week mantra-based program offered a profound method for cultivating mental literacy. Participants not only experienced emotional stabilization and moral awakening but also reported stronger interpersonal relationships, increased confidence, and a renewed commitment to learning and personal growth. The structure of the program, balancing mantra repetition, silent reflection, and expressive journaling, formed a comprehensive and adaptable model of contemplative education.

By embedding this practice within institutions that had already received the four reflective texts, the deployment created an integrated ecosystem. The books seeded conceptual insight, and the mantra gave it breath and rhythm. This synthesis transformed abstract values into embodied experience. The program demonstrated that mental literacy, when approached through spiritually grounded, culturally sensitive methods, can play both a preventative role in psychological distress and a generative role in moral and educational renewal.

3.3 Culture and Community as Anchors for Resilience and Continuity

The third major finding of this study emphasizes the indispensable role of culture and community in sustaining the psychological, moral, and educational transformations initiated through the deployment of reflective and mental literacy practices. While the four distributed texts and the 12-week mantra recitation program provided structured

pedagogical tools, it was the rootedness in local culture and the active engagement of communities that ensured continuity, legitimacy, and long-term impact. This section explores how cultural adaptability, intergenerational collaboration, and community participation functioned as anchors for resilience and as conduits for educational innovation in line with the Tri Dharma values of education, research, and service.

Indonesia's pluralistic society, marked by deeply rooted spiritual traditions, a multitude of languages, and strong community norms, offers both opportunities and complexities for pedagogical reform. Despite fears that spiritual education might be dismissed as antiquated or exclusionary, this initiative was embraced across diverse religious and cultural groups. In regions such as Bali and Lombok, where mantra recitation is embedded in ceremonial life, the program was not seen as foreign or imposed, but rather as a revitalization of existing wisdom. For many participants, especially the younger generation, it served to reconnect them with cultural practices that had faded under the influence of digital modernity and academic standardization.

The adaptability of the intervention was particularly evident in how community leaders and elders were integrated into the rollout. In Bangli, a respected temple caretaker introduced each session with parables grounded in Balinese philosophy, including Tri Kaya Parisudha, the principle of harmony between thought, speech, and action. These stories not only contextualized the mantras but lent moral weight to the practice, making it acceptable even to conservative families or institutions previously wary of experimentation. This finding aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, which holds that relevance and legitimacy are heightened when educational content resonates with the local moral cosmology and epistemological traditions (Gay, 2018).

Intergenerational collaboration emerged as another key strength. Several literacy centres and community libraries, such as TBM Al Muhtaj in Jepara and Perpustakaan Limbah Pustaka in Purbalingga, hosted family reading and discussion sessions that blended the reflective texts with storytelling and communal dialogue. These gatherings became safe spaces where children and parents could reflect together on personal challenges, emotional struggles, and shared values. In one documented session, a father who had remained emotionally distant shared for the first time his childhood trauma and how he saw it mirrored in his son's anxiety. Such exchanges highlight the potential of reflective literacy to restore emotional intimacy and understanding across generational lines.

This intergenerational approach, deeply rooted in communal culture, acted as a trauma-informed educational practice. As Ginwright (2016) suggests, culturally grounded storytelling can serve as a non-clinical, emotionally safe container for expressing pain and reframing adversity. In economically strained communities, where formal mental health infrastructure is often absent, these culturally sensitive interventions provided accessible channels for healing and moral development.

The program's ecumenical impact was another notable outcome. Despite its foundations in Hindu communicative and yogic philosophy, the four books and accompanying mantra practices were welcomed in Islamic, Christian, and interfaith institutions. The universal values embedded in the texts, compassion, introspection, self-regulation, and balance, transcended theological differences. In North Sulawesi, a Christian theology student likened the mantra sessions to *lectio divina*, a contemplative form of Bible reading that emphasizes silence, reflection, and internalization. Such comparisons indicate that moral narrative and contemplative practice can function as "soft bridges" in Indonesia's multi-faith educational landscape (Kessler, 2020).

Cultural resilience was further demonstrated through creative adaptations. In Lombok Barat, traditional Sasak musical instruments were incorporated into the recitation

sessions, enhancing both aesthetic and communal engagement. In Lampung Tengah, at Taman Baca Ar-Rahmah, the books were read aloud during pengajian (religious study) gatherings in a predominantly Muslim village. Discussions following the readings focused on local social issues, such as domestic violence and youth unemployment, thus transforming reflective literacy into a platform for ethical dialogue and social critique. These examples underscore that transformative education is most effective when it aligns with existing rhythms of community life, and when pedagogical materials are seen as tools for contextual moral problem-solving rather than abstract instruction.

This organic cultural adaptation was accompanied by bottom-up institutional innovation. Several schools and literacy centres independently established “reflection zones” or “silent corners” where students could journal or recite mantras. Teachers introduced weekly writing prompts inspired by *Echoes of Equilibrium*, and religious facilitators began incorporating short silent meditation periods into existing services. These simple yet profound shifts demonstrate how culturally attuned education invites sustainable change, not through large-scale policy but through everyday practices embedded in institutional life.

Moreover, the intervention produced discursive shifts within educational leadership structures. At the Kementerian Agama office in Jakarta and the Bimas Hindu Directorate at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, internal meetings began to explore the integration of reflective literacy and contemplative practices into training modules for *penyuluh agama* (religious counsellors). This policy-level engagement reflects a growing recognition that spiritual pedagogy can support psychological well-being and moral education in ways that are both non-denominational and contextually grounded (Gunawan, 2022).

Some resistance was encountered in urban schools, where students initially dismissed mantra practice as “old-fashioned” or “non-scientific.” However, facilitators countered this scepticism by introducing scientific research on stress regulation, cognitive clarity, and neuroplasticity related to contemplative practice. Once students understood mantra in terms of neuroscience and well-being, interest grew. This approach reflects the value of hybrid pedagogy, a model that speaks in the vernacular of modern science while honouring ancestral wisdom (Patton, 2015). It confirms that spiritual education need not be nostalgic or rigid; it can evolve to meet the epistemological needs of a digitally literate, intellectually curious generation.

Equally significant was the program’s low-resource design. It required no specialized equipment, expensive curricula, or external facilitators. Its core components, books, breath, silence, and story, were accessible, scalable, and replicable. This minimalism was especially empowering for under-resourced regions. Teachers and parents in Kalimantan and East Nusa Tenggara repeatedly emphasized that what made the program attractive was its simplicity: “It only needed sincerity, not money.” In this way, spiritual literacy was democratized, providing an emotional and moral scaffold for communities that often face systemic educational and economic neglect.

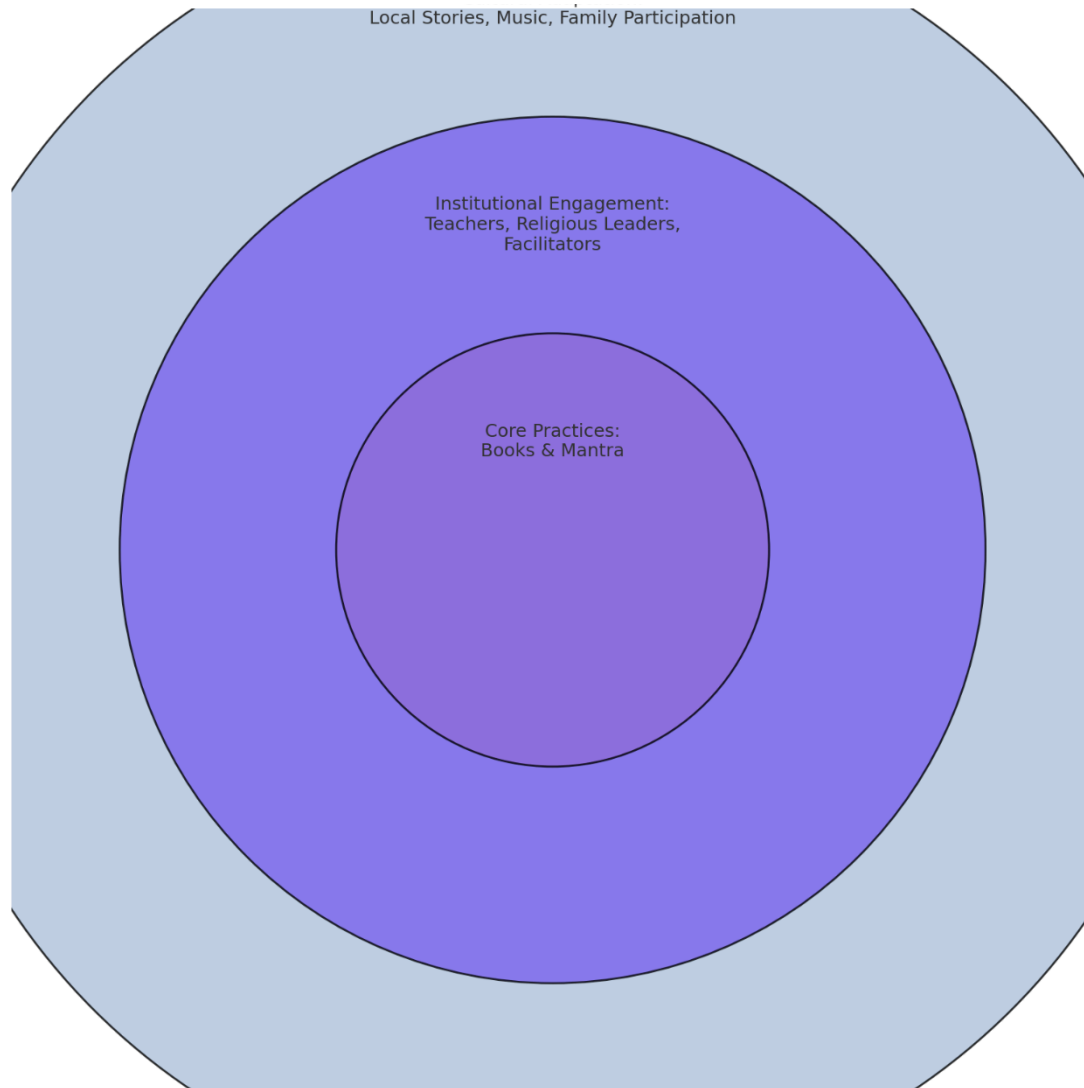


Figure 5. Local Adaptation and Cultural Co-Creation

This concentric circle diagram illustrates how core pedagogical practices, reflective books and mantra recitation, were expanded through community engagement and localized through cultural rituals, music, storytelling, and intergenerational learning. The model captures how grassroots creativity and shared ownership enhanced sustainability.

In the final analysis, the success of this initiative was not due solely to the quality of its texts or the discipline of its practices. Its power lay in its resonance, with memory, with identity, with tradition. The program succeeded because it offered a way for communities to articulate their values in the language of their own culture. It did not seek to universalize a single doctrine but to activate universal virtues within particular cultural frames.

By allowing spiritual and educational practices to emerge from within the community, rather than being imposed from outside, the initiative honoured the indigenous pedagogies that have long existed across the Indonesian archipelago. These include oral storytelling, song-based learning, ritualized reflection, and communal deliberation, all of which were integrated, naturally and authentically, into the program's structure.

This final theme underscores that educational resilience is not simply a question of curriculum or training, it is a function of belonging, continuity, and recognition. When

learners feel culturally seen, when practices feel ancestrally familiar, and when outcomes are collectively celebrated, education becomes more than the transmission of knowledge. It becomes a relational act of regeneration.

In conclusion, the integrative role of community and culture in this initiative affirms that true educational transformation begins where people already are, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. When narrative literacy and mantra-based reflection are embedded within local practices, supported by intergenerational bonds and institutional openness, they cease to be interventions and become movements. Movements of healing, resilience, and moral awakening, rooted not in policy, but in people.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the transformative potential of a culturally embedded educational model that integrates reflective literacy and mental literacy. By deploying four bilingual books and facilitating a 12-week mantra recitation program across diverse institutions in Indonesia, the initiative aimed to cultivate moral awareness, emotional resilience, and culturally adaptive learning. Rooted in the ethical principles of Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, education, research, and community service, this project was more than an academic inquiry. It was a community-centered intervention designed to realign pedagogy with spiritual depth, emotional clarity, and social relevance.

Through mixed-methods research, including reflective journals, surveys, institutional reports, and thematic analysis, the study uncovered consistent shifts in participants' ethical reflection, stress regulation, and educational engagement. The books, *Melampai Kelas*, *Beyond the Classroom*, *Gema Keseimbangan*, and *Echoes of Equilibrium*, served as catalysts for reflective literacy, engaging learners with culturally resonant narratives, ethical dilemmas, and introspective prompts. The 12-week mantra recitation program complemented this by grounding learners in embodied awareness, daily rhythm, and contemplative silence. Together, these dual interventions fostered a holistic learning ecology where reading and reflection, sound and silence, merged into a transformative pedagogy.

Yet, the most enduring impact was not merely intellectual or emotional, it was relational and cultural. Communities did not passively receive the program; they shaped it, localized it, and expanded it. From village libraries to urban religious schools, from Muslim-majority provinces to Hindu theological colleges, the model was translated into diverse idioms and adapted into community rituals, storytelling circles, and spiritual gatherings. This localization affirmed the program's core premise: meaningful education must be culturally situated and communally enacted.

4.1 Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on holistic education by proposing a model that fuses cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of learning. At its core, the project reaffirmed that moral and mental development are not auxiliary to education, they are its foundation. Reflective literacy, as embodied in the four books, encouraged ethical inquiry, introspection, and the reimagining of educational purpose. Mental literacy, cultivated through mantra recitation, invited learners to observe their emotional states, regulate reactive tendencies, and align their actions with deeper values.

Theoretically, this model builds on Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning by extending reflection into the somatic and spiritual domains. Whereas Mezirow emphasized cognitive dissonance as a trigger for transformation, this study demonstrates that spiritual discipline, through rhythm, breath, and sound, can equally foster moral clarity and personal growth. Parker Palmer's (1998) call for "inner knowing" also resonates here:

learning is not simply about knowledge acquisition, but about aligning thought with integrity and action with purpose.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study highlights the power of dual-channel interventions: text-based reflection and sound-based meditation. Participants consistently described the mantra practice as a living bridge to the ideas in the books. Where the books offered ethical stories and reflective questions, the mantras embodied those values through daily practice. This interplay aligns with Dewey's (1938) notion of education as experience, one that must engage the full human being, not merely the intellect.

Furthermore, the study proposes a new metaphor for moral development: rhythm. Rather than viewing morality as a static code or abstract reasoning process, participants described mantra as a "moral metronome" that synchronized their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This rhythmic pedagogy suggests an innovative extension of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory into the spiritual realm: learners develop not only through external scaffolding, but through internal rhythm and repetition that shape their moral landscape.

Importantly, this research challenges the bifurcation between secular learning and spiritual practice. By integrating culturally rooted mantras into educational settings, the model breaks the false dichotomy between reason and faith, between literacy and prayer. In so doing, it calls for an expanded epistemology in education, one that honors indigenous wisdom, spiritual insight, and emotional depth alongside scientific rigor and cognitive skill.

4.2 Practical and Socio-Cultural Significance

On the practical level, the study offers a replicable, cost-effective, and inclusive model of moral and emotional education. The use of printed books, local facilitators, and spiritual practices ensured accessibility across urban and rural settings, regardless of socioeconomic status. Unlike many digital programs that require infrastructure, this model relied on community wisdom, time, and presence, resources often more abundant than technology in under-resourced contexts.

The integration of reflective texts into existing curricula, extracurricular activities, and prayer services enabled teachers to introduce ethical dialogue and emotional literacy without curriculum overhaul. The books' bilingual format and inclusive ethical themes allowed them to travel across linguistic and religious boundaries. At teacher training institutions, the texts were used not only to instruct but to inspire future educators to reflect on the moral purpose of their profession.

The 12-week mantra program proved equally versatile. Framed around universal values, peace, balance, clarity, it was welcomed across Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and interfaith institutions. This cross-religious acceptance, coupled with local cultural adaptations such as musical accompaniment and storytelling rituals, shows the model's resonance in pluralistic societies. It demonstrates that spiritual education can be interfaith, inclusive, and integrative, not sectarian or prescriptive.

At the policy level, the model aligns with the Ministry of Education's Merdeka Belajar initiative, which emphasizes learner autonomy, cultural relevance, and character formation. Regional offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) and the Directorate General of Hindu Community Guidance (Bimas Hindu) expressed interest in integrating aspects of the model into training programs for religious counsellors and educators. This suggests a potential shift in national education discourse, one that acknowledges the role of spiritual literacy and emotional regulation in shaping ethical, resilient citizens.

The socio-cultural impact of the program is most visible in how communities owned and ritualized it. Traditional drumming in Lombok, family reading circles in

Purbalingga, and reflective passages read at communal meals in Sulawesi all point to a transformation of pedagogy into culture. Such co-creation signals the program's sustainability and scalability, particularly in a post-pandemic context where emotional healing, social reconnection, and moral reorientation are urgently needed.

4.3 Limitations, Future Directions, and Closing Reflection

Despite its promising outcomes, this study has limitations. First, it was non-randomized and community-based, prioritizing cultural resonance over controlled comparison. While mixed-methods analysis strengthened validity, a lack of control groups limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Second, while the mantra program included physiological monitoring at select sites, the small sample size and variable implementation prevented broader generalization. Third, the highly contextualized nature of the intervention, adapted across 23 provinces, means results were deeply localized, and cross-site uniformity was limited.

Future research should focus on longitudinal tracking to assess whether the observed changes in emotional regulation and moral insight endure beyond the 12-week intervention. Comparative studies between mantra and other contemplative practices could help isolate specific effects. Additionally, digital extensions, such as mobile apps for reflective journaling or mantra recording, could enhance scalability without diluting cultural depth, if designed with care.

Interfaith adaptations also merit exploration. The study's success across religious boundaries suggests potential for a shared spiritual pedagogy rooted in breath, silence, and story. Such adaptations could play a role in peacebuilding, civic education, and interreligious dialogue, especially in regions marked by historical tensions.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to a growing call for pluralistic educational models that validate non-Western epistemologies and spiritual practices. It challenges educators and policymakers to see literacy not merely as decoding symbols, but as decoding self, community, and meaning. By integrating narrative and silence, reflection and rhythm, this project affirms a model of education that heals, rather than fragments; that connects, rather than isolates.

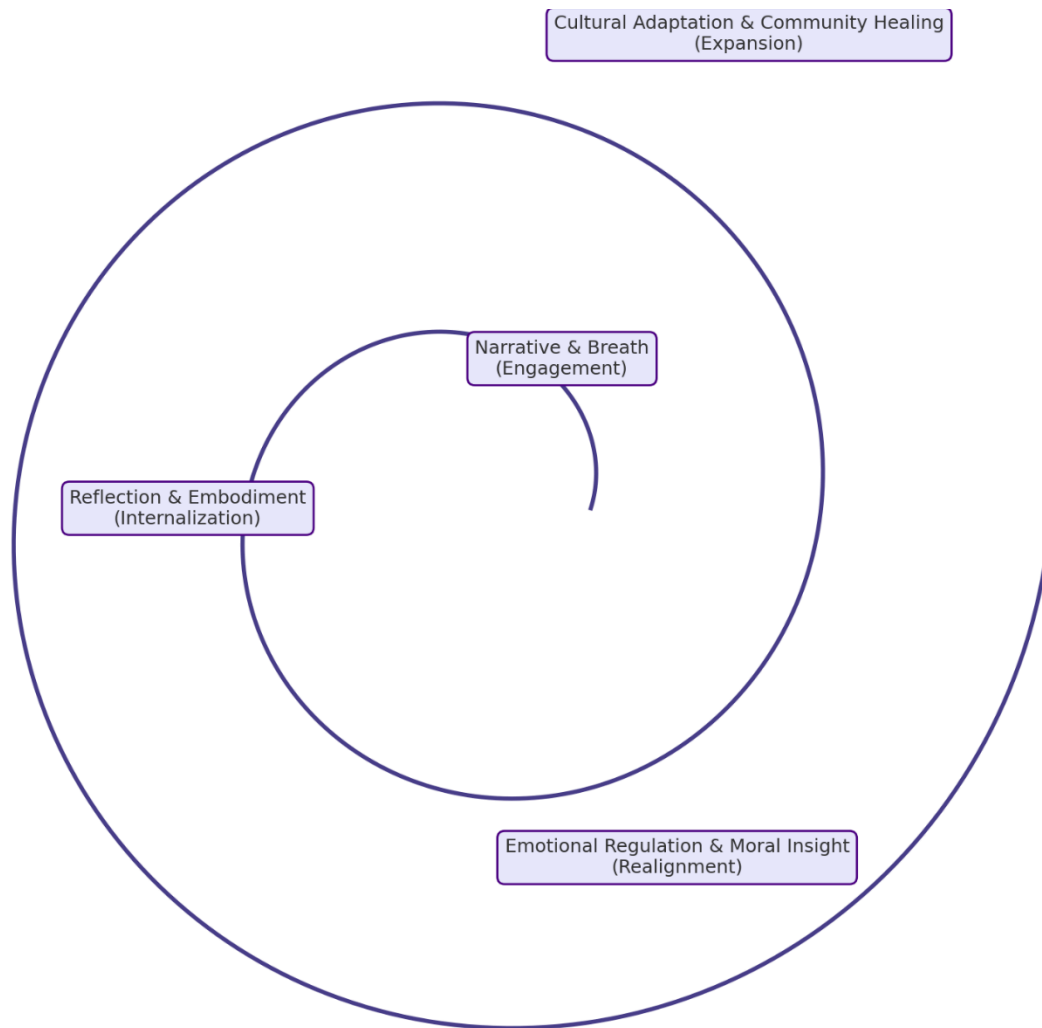


Figure 6. The Spiral of Transformative Learning Through Reflective and Mental Literacy

This spiral model captures the developmental trajectory triggered by the intervention. It begins with narrative and breath-based engagement, deepens into self-reflection and embodied insight, advances into emotional regulation and moral clarity, and culminates in cultural reintegration and communal healing, illustrating how learning becomes transformation.

In closing, this initiative was not just a pedagogical experiment, but a reweaving of wisdom traditions with contemporary learning needs. Through story, breath, and community, it invited learners to rediscover purpose, to sit with uncertainty, and to awaken to shared humanity. As Indonesia, and the world, grapples with polarization, burnout, and existential disconnection, the model presented here offers an alternative future: one where education becomes a practice of remembering who we are, why we learn, and how we live together.

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