



Illustrated book design on Asmat tribe culture in Papua: Promoting local cultural awareness among children

Zophia Aprilia Veruschka¹, Nofria Doni Fitri^{2*}

Desain Komunikasi Visual, Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa dan Desain Visi Indonesia, Jl. Tamansiswa No.150B, Yogyakarta, 55151, Indonesia

*donifitri13@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Asmat is one of the largest tribes in Papua. The Asmat tribe is divided into two coastal and inland areas. The Asmat people tend to be fishermen or hunters. However, besides these two professions, a true woodcarver is another profession of this tribe. The uniqueness and high cultural value of this tribal woodcarving art are very well known. However, the development of the era, knowledge and technology resulted in many foreign cultures entering. The entry of foreign cultures into Indonesia quickly influences various lines of people's lives. Therefore, it is essential to introduce native Indonesian cultures to this generation so that they get to know ethnic groups in Indonesia; educational facilities are needed to teach the culture of ethnic groups in Indonesia in a language that children understand, with illustrations that are interesting and evocative. The educational tool is the Asmat Tribe Culture Illustration Book.

Keywords: *Illustration, book, culture, Asmat tribe, Papua*

ABSTRAK

Asmat adalah salah satu suku terbesar yang mendiami Papua. Suku Asmat terbagi menjadi dua wilayah, yaitu pesisir dan pedalaman. Masyarakat Asmat cenderung menjadi nelayan atau pemburu. Selain kedua profesi tersebut, pemahat kayu merupakan profesi lain dari suku ini. Keunikan dan nilai budaya yang tinggi pada seni ukir kayu suku ini sudah sangat terkenal. Seiring perkembangan zaman, ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi mengakibatkan banyak masuknya budaya asing. Masuknya budaya asing ke Indonesia membawa pengaruh yang sangat cepat dalam berbagai lini kehidupan masyarakat. Oleh karena itu penting untuk memperkenalkan budaya asli Indonesia kepada generasi ini agar mereka mengenal suku-suku yang ada di Indonesia, diperlukan sarana pendidikan sebagai upaya untuk memperkenalkan budaya suku-suku yang ada di Indonesia dengan bahasa yang mudah dimengerti oleh anak-anak, ilustrasi yang menarik, menarik dan menggugah. Alat edukasi yang digunakan adalah buku ilustrasi budaya Suku Asmat.

Kata Kunci: *Ilustrasi, buku, kebudayaan, suku Asmat, Papua*

Article history

Sent:
May 2024

Accepted:
June 2024

Published:
June 2024

Citation:

Veruschka, Z. L., and Fitri, N. D. (2024). Illustrated book design on Asmat Tribe culture in Papua: Promoting local cultural awareness among children. *Sungging: Jurnal Seni Rupa, Kriya, Desain dan Pembelajarannya* 3(1): 34-45.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia stretches from Sabang to Merauke and is rich in natural and cultural resources. Its unique ethnic diversity has attracted global attention. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Indonesia has 300 ethnic groups and 1,340 tribes (Kristianto, 2020). Among the many tribes in Indonesia, Papua stands out with its distinct characteristics, particularly the Asmat tribe, located in the remote areas of South Papua Province.

The Asmat tribe resides in lowland areas surrounded by mangrove forests, swamps, rivers, and the sea. This geographical condition divides the Asmat tribe into coastal and inland regions. The Asmat people living in remote areas tend to be hunters and garden farmers, while those in coastal regions are generally fishermen (Handaya, 2021). However, the Asmat tribe is not only known for farming and fishing but also for their renowned and globally recognised woodcarving skills.

The woodcarving art of the Asmat tribe is highly unique and appreciated by art connoisseurs worldwide, including in the United States, France, and the Netherlands. Carving serves as a medium connecting them with their ancestral spirits, reflecting their daily spiritual life. The carvings adorn the tall pillars of their traditional buildings. The main themes in their carvings are ornaments or motifs derived from their ancestors, known as *mbis*. Additionally, there are carvings of boats, or *wuramon*, believed to be the vehicles of their ancestors in the afterlife. Their love for woodcarving is a way to honour their ancestral spirits. The patterns of their carvings also depict their daily life, such as trees, fauna, people in boats, and hunters. Due to their distinctiveness, Asmat carvings are renowned worldwide and frequently feature in significant exhibitions abroad.

With the advancement of knowledge and technology, many foreign cultures have entered Indonesia, often quickly influencing various aspects of society (Budiarto, 2022). One form of cultural amalgamation in Indonesia is the influx of American, Korean, and Japanese cultures, which rapidly spread, particularly among the Alpha generation, who are easily influenced (Andari, 2022). The Alpha generation, born after 2010 (Yasir, 2021), is characterised by independence, solitude, a lack of creativity, and a constant attachment to electronic devices. This continuous use of gadgets leads to social isolation among children (Saman & Hidayati, 2023).

Child development is based on cognitive, language, moral, and religious aspects, while physical motor and socio-emotional development are prominent at this age. These developmental stages are crucial, and it is beneficial to direct all stimuli toward these aspects. Therefore, introducing Indonesia's indigenous cultures to this generation is essential, enabling them to recognise the diverse ethnic groups in Indonesia. This recognition fosters perseverance, tolerance, appreciation of diversity, patriotism, and the development of socio-cultural competence.

Based on the author's observations, many books depict the lives of various Indonesian tribes for elementary school children. However, these are dominated by significant tribes such as Javanese, Balinese, and others. However, there are no children's books illustrating the tribes in Papua, particularly the Asmat tribe. To address these issues, educational resources are needed to introduce Indonesian tribes to children in an easily understandable language. An illustrated book on the culture of the Asmat tribe would serve as an educational tool for children.

The design of a book on the Asmat tribe's life will present illustrations of their unique characteristics as part of the Indonesian ethnic groups. This book will feature their unique aspects, such as the swampy environment in Asmat with few roads, primarily wooden bridges. The Asmat tribe is divided into 12 ethnic groups and has five dialects. They believe that their carvings communicate with the spirit world of their ancestors. They are blessed with abundant sago and fish, and their skill has made them master carvers. Their culture, known as the wood culture, stems from their ability to utilise wood for survival. They believe that "Wood is Asmat, and Asmat is the tree" (Luthfy, 2019).

Due to their uniqueness, they have gained worldwide recognition. This book aims to be produced in hardcopy form, serving as a local content learning medium in schools. Indirectly, this book can also promote tourism in Asmat Regency.

The illustrations in this book complement the text, making it a communication and information strategy about Asmat culture that aims to help children understand the reading

material more efficiently. To attract children's interest in reading, the presence of illustrations will provide insights into the diversity and uniqueness of the Asmat tribe. According to John Medina (2015), author of "Brain Rules," information without illustrations is remembered by only 10% of the audience, but when information is accompanied by illustrations, memory retention increases to 65%. Illustrations are crucial in making the message easier to understand effectively and efficiently. Therefore, the illustrations are designed meticulously to be more than just textual data support.

Reading is a physical and psychological process where we observe text visually and think about processing information. The benefits of reading include stimulating the brain, reducing stress, increasing knowledge, expanding vocabulary, enhancing memory, honing analytical thinking skills, improving focus and concentration, enhancing writing skills, broadening perspectives, increasing social relationships, and connecting with the outside world, thus intervening in character formation (Patiung, 2016).

In 2021, Indonesia's reading interest rate was still low, with an average of 59.52 points, the highest in DIY at 70.55 points, and the weakest in Papua at 47.43 points (Indonesian Statistics 2022). Many factors hinder children's reading habits, including the lack of quality reading materials to meet children's reading desires (Marlina, 2021).

The author has created an illustrated book about the unique and globally recognised life of the Asmat tribe to shape character, divert children's attention from gadgets, prevent the negative influence of foreign cultures on child development, increase children's reading interest, and introduce them to their national culture.

This book aims to broaden children's thinking and positively impact their lives, especially those aged 4-7. They can learn the values of the Asmat tribe's life. By learning about the diversity of tribes, traditional houses, and musical instruments, they will develop a love for their country, high tolerance, and an interest in learning about other tribes in Indonesia.

So far, no illustrated book about the Asmat tribe targeting elementary school children has been published. Therefore, this book's design is expected to be appropriate and packaged in a visually appealing design with suitable colours. It is hoped that it will be easy for children to remember the information and spark their interest in reading.

The availability of a hardcopy illustrated book about the Asmat tribe for elementary school children serves as a medium to learn about the Asmat tribe's culture and fosters closer relationships between children and their parents. It opens children's minds to cultural diversity and fosters tolerance among tribes and cultures, increasing interest in reading.

The benefits of this book for children, considering its attractive and stimulating illustrations, make it easier for children to understand the story's content. It motivates them to read, sparks curiosity, supports imagination, and improves communication skills. In terms of content, this book trains children to be optimistic about cultural diversity, stimulates social sensitivity in interacting within a heterogeneous environment, teaches the importance of diversity and how to respect differences, and shapes their identity as Indonesian children. Additionally, accompanying and guiding children in learning from this book can be an alternative activity for fathers to establish communication and emotional bonds with their children.

This book predominantly features a cheerful and eye-catching visual portrayal of a little girl character for children. This character helps convey the author's intended messages and serves as a source of inspiration for children, making the book and its contents memorable for readers.

The colours used are aligned with the colours of the Asmat tribe's culture. The layout of the illustrations follows design principles and is cohesive with the text. Illustrations function as practical visual communication tools, making message delivery efficient. Data and information about the Asmat tribe are obtained from reliable sources, processed, and packaged into messages easily understood by children.

The illustrated book on Asmat culture in Papua is designed using a child character to make it easier for elementary school-aged readers to understand the story. With this book, children are more motivated to read. The book fosters curiosity, supports imagination, and enhances children's communication skills. Furthermore, this book trains children to be optimistic about cultural diversity, sharpens social skills in interacting within a heterogeneous environment, teaches the

importance of diversity and how to respect differences, and shapes their identity as Indonesians from an early age. The availability of this illustrated book on Asmat culture for children will increase reading interest among Indonesian children and foster a high tolerance spirit.

METHOD

This research began with an introduction followed by the collection of primary data. The primary data was gathered using a qualitative approach through interviews with several sources. The interviews were conducted with (1) a content creator who has lived in Asmat Regency for an extended period and has numerous videos about Asmat on the website, ensuring the accuracy of the information obtained, and (2) civil servants, specifically teachers and healthcare workers residing in Asmat Regency.

Secondary data was obtained by reviewing the literature, including books, reports, articles, magazines, and internet data, to support the data collection process. Documentation was also necessary to collect data using visual references from the internet, books, and videos from websites, which were then used as references in designing the illustrated book.

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. Descriptive qualitative research describes an object, phenomenon, or social setting narratively. This method includes data quotations (facts) to support the presented information. Based on the collected data, facts, and visual references regarding the Asmat tribe, the author filled the book with self-created illustrations, ensuring the accuracy of the information.

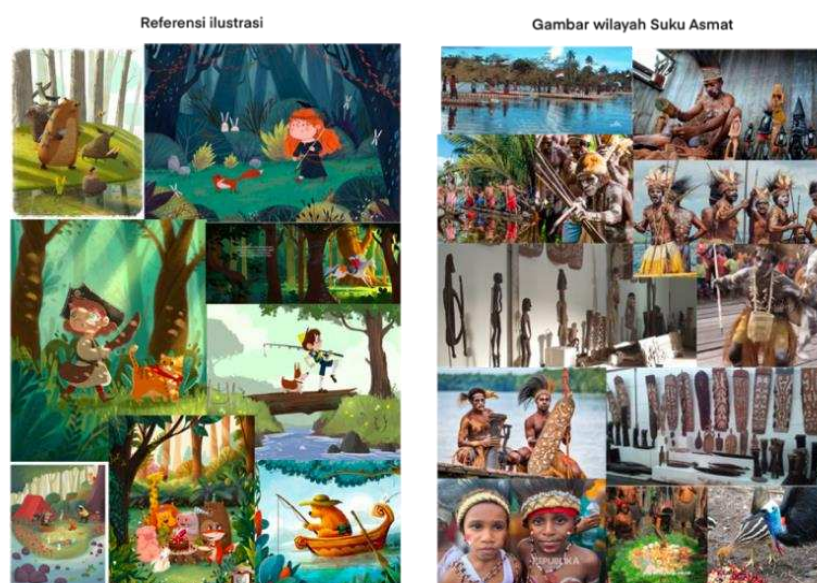
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Concept and Ideas

The concept applied in the design of this illustrated book highlights the unique culture of the Asmat Tribe in Papua as a topic for introducing culture to children throughout Indonesia. The book's entire content will showcase the culture and traditions of the Asmat Tribe, visualised through child-themed illustrations set in forest environments to represent the Asmat people's closeness to nature.

a. Moodboard

This section includes a collection of visual analyses in the form of photos and pictures used as references to help realise the illustrations in the book design.



Picture 1. Moodboard for designing an Asmat illustration book
(Source: Pinterest)

b. Sketches

Sketching becomes easier after identifying reference pictures to draft illustration designs. Below are some sketches created by the author after compiling the mood board.



Picture 2. Asmat book illustration sketch
(Source: Personal Documentation)

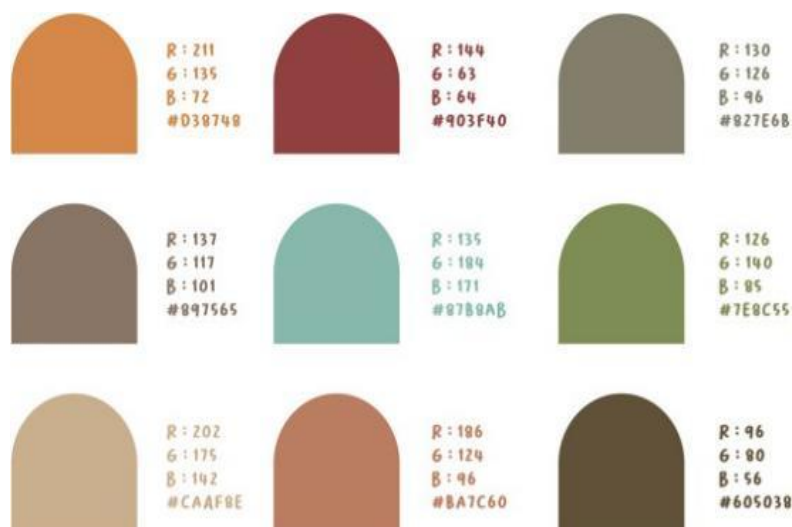
2. Target Audience

- Demographics: Children aged 4-7 years, both boys and girls. Educational level: Preschool to elementary school.
- Psychographics:
 - Parents who want to provide the best education for their children.
 - Those who prefer their children not to spend too much time on smartphones.
 - Those who know the importance of cultural knowledge from an early age.
 - Parents who want to spend quality time with their children.
- Geographics: Children across all regions of Indonesia

4. Selection of Design Elements

a. Colors

The colour characteristics for children tend to refer to a diverse and cheerful palette. The colour tone is bright but not overly striking, as this book is intended for children. In addition to bright colours, dark colours are also used to depict natural colours like trees.



Picture 3. Selection of colour tones to be used in book illustrations
(Source: Personal Documentation)

b. Typography

The script includes three font types. The book title on the front cover uses Purple Smile, while the contents combine Purple Smile, Happy Chicken, and KG Red Hands. The types of letters applied in the book are as follows.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

Purple Smile

Picture 4. Purple Smile Font
(Source: Personal Documentation)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

HAPPY CHICKEN

Picture 5. Happy Chicken Font
(Source: Personal Documentation)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

KG Red Hands

Picture 6. KG Red Hands Font
(Source: Personal Documentation)

c. Illustration

The visualisation technique chosen is a digital illustration using textured brushes with some freely created foliage and animals depicted as friendly creatures.

- Characters

The child characters in the book are based on the features of Papuan people dressed in traditional and casual clothing. The casual attire is illustrated so readers outside Papua do not mistakenly think that traditional clothing is worn daily.



Picture 7. Illustrations of characters in books
(Source: Personal Documentation)

- Background

All backgrounds or illustrations include numerous trees and leaves representing the Asmat Tribe's closeness to nature.



Picture 9. The background for the contents of the illustration book
(Source: Personal Documentation)

- Animals

The book features illustrations of animals native to Papua, such as the bird of paradise, black cockatoo, cassowary, and yellow-crested cockatoo, adding more elements.



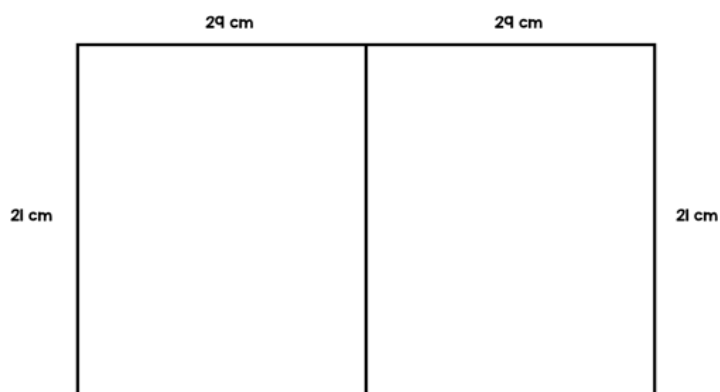
Picture 10. Illustration of various fauna
(Source: Personal Documentation)

5. Layout and Composition

The book uses an axial layout, with a solid visual centre on each page and supporting elements around the primary picture. Text placement is also adjusted to the illustrations on each page, with a left-to-right reading direction.

6. Media Usage

The book will be printed in a size of 21 cm x 29 cm.



Picture 11. Media size selection
(Source: Personal Documentation)

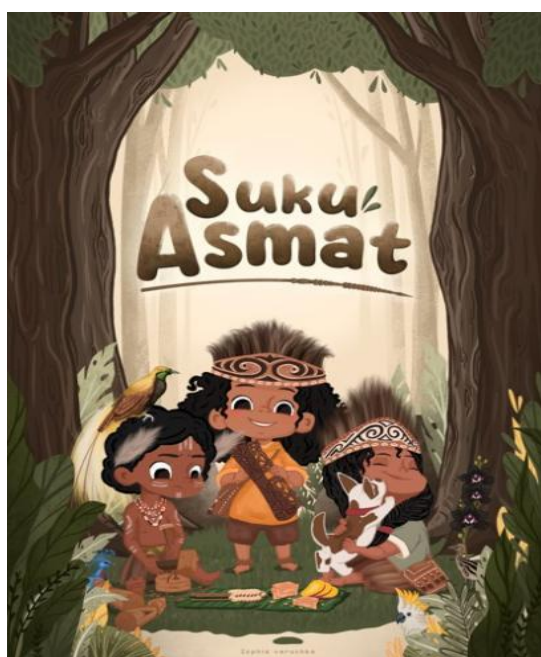
7. Technical Aspects

The software used to design this illustrated book includes Procreate and Adobe Illustrator. Procreate is used for all illustrations in the book, while Adobe Illustrator is used for text placement and typography/font selection.

8. Result:

a. Front Cover

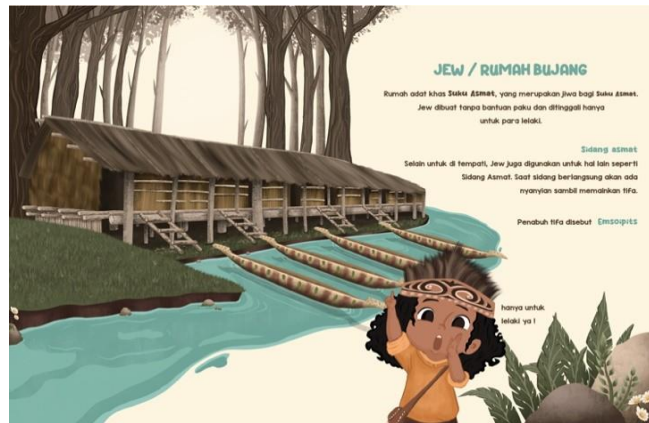
The front cover design features three illustrated children in a forest and some unique elements of the Asmat Tribe, such as traditional food, carvers, esse/noken, black orchid flowers, and several animals. The forest background complements the overall atmosphere.



Picture 12. Final Cover Front
(Source: Personal Documentation)

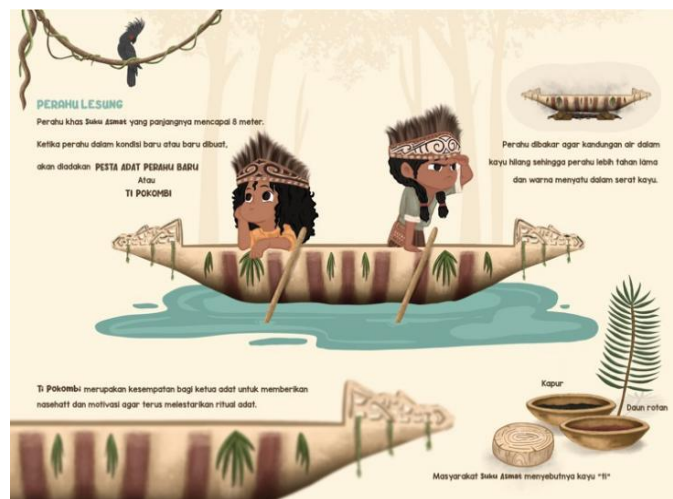
b. Content Pages

Picture 13 illustrates the traditional house (Jew/male house) of the Asmat Tribe by the river, accompanied by explanations and descriptions of activities conducted within the home. This page also includes illustrations of plants and trees.



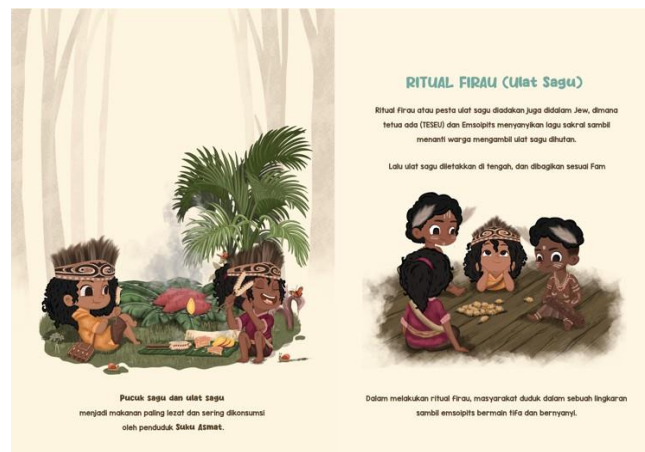
Picture 13. The final image of the book's contents, page - 1
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Picture 14 provides information about the making and materials used for creating dugout canoes, which are significant to the Asmat Tribe.



Picture 14. The final image of the book's contents, page - 2
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Picture 15 depicts children's characters consuming traditional Asmat food while explaining the sago worm ritual performed in the Jew house.



Picture 15. The final image of the book's contents, page - 3
(Source: Personal Documentation)

c. Back Cover

The back cover briefly explains the book's content, featuring simple illustrations of trees and plants.



Picture 16. The final image of the book's back cover
(Source: Personal Documentation)



Picture 17. The final appearance of the book
(Source: Personal Documentation)

CONCLUSION

The design of the illustrated book on the Asmat Tribe aims to preserve the culture of the Asmat Tribe through the medium of a book, targeting children as an effort to introduce culture from an early age. The educational medium is an illustrated book to help children recognise and understand this cultural heritage.

Based on observations, there are many books depicting the lives of tribes in Indonesia for elementary school-aged children; however, these books predominantly feature significant tribes such as Javanese, Balinese, and Sasak, among others. No children's books illustrate the tribes in Papua, specifically the Asmat Tribe. Therefore, to address these issues, there is a need for educational resources that introduce the cultures of various Indonesian tribes in a language understood by children, accompanied by engaging and evocative illustrations. This educational resource is the Illustrated Book on the Culture of the Asmat Tribe.

After researching and completing the creation of this children's illustrated book about the culture of the Asmat Tribe in Papua, the author suggests that future research should focus on creating and highlighting the cultures or tribes in Indonesia that do not yet have many children's books with illustrated themes.

REFERENCES

- Andari, N. (2022). *Efek budaya asing dan iklan mempengaruhi gaya konsumtif terhadap produk kuliner Jepang*. Prosiding Semnaskom - Unram.
- Budiarto, G. (2022). Indonesia dalam pusaran globalisasi dan pengaruhnya terhadap krisis moral dan karakter. *Jurnal Pamator*, 13(1). 50–56. [10.21107/pamator.v13i1.6912](https://doi.org/10.21107/pamator.v13i1.6912)
- Firdhiana, S. & Anggapuspa, M. L. (2021). Perancangan Buku Ilustrasi Mengenai Jajanan Khas Kota Probolinggo sebagai media edukasi anak usia 6–12 tahun. *Jurnal Barik*, 3(1). 170–180.
- Handaya, R. D. (2021). Indigenous people, local belief, and its protection in Indonesia: Case of Asmat tribe belief. *Law Research Review Quarterly*, 7(3), 257–268. <https://doi.org/10.15294/lrrq.v7i3.48163>
- Kristianto, W. A. (2020). *Peran Generasi Penerus Bangsa Dalam Mempertahankan Budaya Bangsa Indonesia (The Role of the Nation's Next Generation in Defending Indonesian Nation's Culture)*. Jurnal Unmas.
- Linggasari, D. (2022). *Realitas dibalik indahnya ukiran*. Penerbit Kunci Ilmu
- Lestari, S. D. (2010). *Jelajah budaya Suku Asmat*. Multi Kreasi Satudelapan.
- Luthfy, R. (2019). *Merawat kebudayaan Asmat*. [Skripsi, tidak diterbitkan]. Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- Mangundjaya, W. L. H. (2020). *Pengembangan organisasi: Diagnosis dan intervensi*. Jakad Media Publishing.
- Marlina, N. (2021). Hubungan minat membaca dengan prestasi belajar mata pelajaran IPS kelas III SD Karangayam. *Literasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 12(1). 1–11. [http://dx.doi.org/10.21927/literasi.2021.12\(1\).1-11](http://dx.doi.org/10.21927/literasi.2021.12(1).1-11)
- Patiung, D. (2016). Membaca sebagai sumber pengembangan intelektual. *Jurnal Al Daulah*, 5(2). 352–367.
- Pujiastuti, N. (2020). *Suku Asmat*. Pustaka Tiga Kelana.
- Pranata, A. (2020). *Perancangan Ilustrasi Cerita Rakyat We Tadampali Untuk Siswa Sekolah Dasar*. [Skripsi, tidak diterbitkan]. Universitas Negeri Makassar.
- Saman, A.M & Hidayati, D. (2023). Pola asuh orang tua milenial dalam mendidik anak generasi *alpha* di era transformasi digital. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 7(1). 984–992. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v7i1.4557>
- Samderubun, G. & Izdiha, A. (2023). *Dinamika Kedudukan, Peran Dan Status Perempuan Suku Asmat Pendekatan Arena Kultural Pierre Bourdieu*. Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi & Sosial, 153- 170.
- Setiady, G. V. (2019). *Perancangan Buku Ilustrasi Pedoman untuk Ilustrator Buku Cerita Anak*. Digilib. [Skripsi, tidak diterbitkan]. Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta.

- Sukohedi, A. (2011). Analisa arsitektur tradisional Suku Asmat Kabupaten Merauke Provinsi Papua. *Jurnal Median Arsitektur dan Planologi*, 1(1). 25–33.
- Wijaya, P., et al. (2013). Perancangan buku ilustrasi anak berjudul Kerajaan Fantasi Indonesia bertema gotong royong. *Jurnal Desain Komunikasi Visual Adiwarna*, 1(2).
- Wignydiputro, F.F., Tanudjaja, B.B. & Salamoon, D.K. (2018). *Perancangan Buku Cerita Ilustrasi Tentang 'Kebiasaan Jorok Anak' Untuk Usia 3-6 Tahun Dipadukan dengan Teknik Digital Imaging*. Petra.
- Yasir, M & Susilawati. (2021). Pendidikan karakter pada generasi *alpha*: Tanggung jawab, disiplin dan kerja keras. *Jurnal PKM*, 4(3), 309–317.