

REJUNG AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE: ORAL TRADITION AND IDENTITY TRANSMISSION IN THE SEMENDE ETHNIC TRADITION IN SOUTH SUMATRA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This research aims to examine the paradigm of oral tradition transmission of the Rejung people in the Semende community through an ethnopedagogical perspective.

Methods. The method used in this research is a qualitative research approach with an ethnographic orientation.

Results. The research findings indicate that *rejung*, as an oral tradition of the Semende people, is not merely a form of expressive art, but also a manifestation of a living and continuously evolving local knowledge system. Through its poetic structure, mother tongue, and socio-communal context, the *rejung* plays a dual role as a medium of oral pedagogy and cultural articulation that is resistant to the dominance of formal and global epistemologies. Within a pedagogical framework, the *rejung* provides an alternative educational model that is contextual, participatory, and based on collective experience. The process of passing down the *rejung* through vertical (parent to child), horizontal (peer to peer), and oblique (traditional figure to community) channels reflects the strength of social relationships in the reproduction of values, ethics, and spirituality. The knowledge contained in the *rejung* is not conveyed instructionally, but rather through affective, performative, and symbolic engagement that is integrated into the daily lives of the community.

Conclusions. *Rejung* serves as evidence that knowledge systems based on local experience, spirituality, and mother tongue have their own validity, no less meaningful than formal education systems. Therefore, recognising pedagogical practices like *rejung* is an important step in building inclusive, contextual, and epistemically just education.

Keywords: cultural resistance, ethnic Semende, identity inheritance, oral tradition, *rejung*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries with a diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures that serves as an essential source and part of the world's cultural civilisation. One effort to preserve this diverse and unique culture is through the oral tradition (Simatupang et al., 2024). Oral tradition is one form of cultural heritage passed down through generations and is an essential foundation in shaping society's identity. Through oral traditions such as songs, narratives, and poetry, communities have developed a non-formal education system rich in meaning, capable of shaping the way of thinking, acting, and understanding the world holistically (Rosyad, 2025). Furthermore, Nelvittia Purba et al. (2023) explain that oral traditions in indigenous communities are not only a form of aesthetics or entertainment but also a medium for transmitting collective history, moral values, spirituality, and social cultures.

In an era of globalisation that is evolving, it naturally has a tangible impact on the modern education system. Oral forms of knowledge are increasingly forgotten

due to the dominance of written literacy, which is considered more “valid” in mainstream epistemological construction (Purwantiasning, 2022). According to Siti Indriyan Hulmudi and Yudi Sukmayadi (2025), local knowledge passed down through cultural practices is increasingly neglected as a result of a formal education system that is more oriented towards written literacy and standardised curriculum. Consequently, this creates a gap between educational institutions and educational experiences within the community, where the knowledge, values and principles that shape the community’s cultural identity are often not recognised as legitimate parts of the learning process (Cantika et al., 2024; Sukiastini et al., 2024). Therefore, the local values that are alive and passed down through the informal education mechanisms of a community are not part of the national curriculum.

It is in this space that oral traditions like *rejung* serve an essential role as a value-based educational medium for the Semende ethnic community in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Rejung not only contains cultural narratives but also embodies an ethnopedagogical inheritance system rooted in social practices and family structures. Therefore, understanding rejung as part of informal education is not just a form of cultural preservation but also an effort to reposition local epistemology as the foundational concept of community-based education.

Rejung is part of the cultural life of the Semende people in South Sumatra, functioning not only as an expression of oral art but also as the main way of transmitting cultural values. These values include social principles such as respect for ancestors, intergenerational relationships, cooperation, and spirituality, which are embedded in the structure of the poetry and its context of delivery. Rejung is usually performed in a dialogical, reflective, and communicative atmosphere, such as during family celebrations, traditional rituals, or community gatherings. Therefore, rejung is viewed not only as a cultural heritage but also as a community-based educational system grounded in experience, values, and social relationships.

The study in this research uses an ethnopedagogical perspective to understand rejung as a form of education rooted in community traditions. Ethnopedagogy emphasises the importance of integrating local values, mother tongue, and cultural practices into the learning system (Sukiastini et al., 2024). In this context, knowledge is not only understood as the accumulation of information but as the result of historical experiences and social relations that shape the learning structures of society (Gündoğan, 2021). Through these perspectives, Rejung is not understood as an educational act carried out through social participation, collective memory, and symbolic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of inheriting rejung can be understood through the cultural inheritance theoretical framework of Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981), which divides the pathways of cultural transmission into three forms: vertical (from parents to children), hori-

zontal (between members of the same generation), and oblique (from traditional elders or community figures to the general population). In the practice of rejung, the tree runs concurrently through participation in social events, youth involvement in listening to or reciting poetry, and the symbolic influence of cultural figures. This theory is supported by an understanding of the processes of internalisation, socialisation, and enculturation (Berry et al., 2011), where cultural values are not only transmitted verbally but are instilled through repeated social experiences in everyday contexts. Thus, the rejung represents a form of oral pedagogy that functions within the context of community life, not as a formal performance, but as part of a living culture.

Rejung, as an oral art form passed down through generations, is a form of soft resistance that reclaims educational spaces dominated by the formal system. Through his poems, Rejung subtly yet powerfully conveys local values and knowledge, shaping collective identity. A similar perspective was put forward by Michel De Certeau (1984) through the concept of tactics, which are non-institutional cultural actions used by subordinate groups to create meaning in spaces controlled by power. Rejung is a form of cultural tactic used by the Semende people that creatively infiltrates social and digital spaces to maintain their local epistemology. This shows that oral pedagogies like Rejung cannot be seen as marginalised phenomena, but rather as active mechanisms in building cultural vitality.

In the global educational landscape, practices like rejung also align with the concept of dialogic pedagogy proposed by Paulo Freire et al. (2018), where education should be participatory, reflective, and liberating. Rejung, with its symbolic question–and–answer structure and performative experience, creates a non-judgmental pedagogical space that, through dialogue, fosters cultural awareness. Barbara Rogoff (2006) also stated that the best learning occurs when children are actively involved in meaningful cultural practices. In this case, rejung becomes a space for deep cultural participation (the guided participation), where learning occurs through observation, involvement, and imitation within a social environment rich in symbols and meaning.

More broadly, the rejung shares similarities with the oral practices of various indigenous communities around the world. In West Africa, for example, there is a griot tradition that serves as a historical reminder, a teller of moral values, and a link between generations through music and poetry (Ebine, 2019). In Latin America, the Quechua people use ritual songs as a pedagogical medium to transmit cosmologies and life values that are not captured in written language (Dedenbach-Salazar, 2024). Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, the hudhud tradition among the Ifugao community in the Philippines (Constantino, 2021) and the pantun in Malay society also play a similar role (Bartosh et al., 2023)—namely, maintaining the continuity of local knowledge through creative and collective oral practices.

These studies show that oral pedagogical practices are not just a local characteristic, but a global phenomenon with its own epistemological complexities. Nevertheless, the historical, social, and symbolic context of each tradition is highly unique. Therefore, the study of Rejung contributes specifically to enriching the global discourse

on community-based education, oral pedagogy, and cultural resistance. By bringing together cultural resistance theory, critical pedagogy, and indigenous community practices, this article aims not only to describe rejang as a local tradition but also to position it as a relevant form of alternative epistemology within the global education and culture discourse. This study fills a gap in the literature within the Indonesian context, as well as opening cross-cultural discussions about the importance of recognising, understanding, and facilitating non-formal educational practices rooted in local community cultures.

METHODS

This research approach is qualitative, with an ethnographic orientation, as the primary focus of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the cultural practices of rejang within the context of the Semende community's life in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The ethnographic method was chosen not only as a data collection strategy, but as a way of thinking that places the researcher in a position to listen, immerse themselves in, and understand cultural practices from the perspective of the actors (Achmad & Ida, 2018) (Achmad & Ida, 2018). This research is not aimed at generalising, but rather at reconstructing the local meanings inherent in the practice of inheriting rejang and the values it contains.

The research location is focused on the Semende community area in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, specifically in the social environment where the rejang tradition is still actively practiced. The selection of informants was done purposively, considering their involvement in the rejang tradition, whether as storytellers, active listeners, or cultural actors involved in the process of transmission. The key informants consist of traditional elders, rejang masters, parents who still pass down this tradition to their children, and community figures who serve as intermediaries in social practice.

Data collection techniques were carried out through a combination of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted by directly participating in various social and customary activities where rejang is typically delivered orally by community members, especially in culturally significant contexts such as celebrations, discussions, or family rituals. This approach aims to capture the symbolic dimensions, local values, and social context of the rejang practice, which cannot be reached through a purely textual approach. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, emphasising dialogue and joint reflection with the informants on the meaning, values, and process of rejang inheritance. Documentation in the form of audio, video, and field notes is used to record the structure of the verses, the context of their delivery, and the social interactions that accompany the practice of rejang.

The data analysis process is carried out thematically and reflectively (Dirna, 2025). The data obtained were examined through the meaning-making stage, which linked

the informants' narratives with the conceptual framework used—such as cultural inheritance theory, cultural values, and ethnopedagogy. The analysis focuses not on quantifying the findings, but on understanding how *rejung* became part of the informal education system, how values are instilled through this practice, and how it contributes to the continuity of Semende cultural identity.

In this study, data validity was not achieved solely through technical triangulation, but through long-term engagement, collaborative review with informants (member checking), and the creation of a dialogic space between researchers and the community (Haryoko et al., 2020). This research is also based on the principle of participatory ethics, where informants are actively involved in providing consent, filtering sensitive information, and guiding researchers towards practices considered appropriate within their cultural context.

RESULTS

The Semende people are an indigenous community residing in the mountainous region of South Sumatra, with the main distribution in Muara Enim Regency, Pagar Alam, and extending to Bengkulu and Lampung (Delfi et al., 2023). Geographically and administratively, Semende customs are still alive in the eight former marga territories in South Sumatra, namely Marga Semende Darat Ulu, Darat Tengah, Darat Laut, Mekakau Ulu, Mekakau Ilir, Sindang Danau, Sungai Are, and Bayur (Arifin, 2024). This indicates that the cultural network of the Semende people is quite extensive and dynamic, with migration patterns that continue to bring their cultural practices and value systems with them.

This community is known for its distinctive social and cultural systems, including semi-matrilineal kinship, where descent is traced through the mother's side, but not entirely as in Pagaruyung-Minangkabau (Arifin, 2019), the custom of deliberation called *rakut maufakat*, and a strong system of spiritual values. In this community, a system of inheritance and preservation of heritage property held by the eldest daughter, known as *Tunggu Tubang Anak Betine*, also developed. This model creates a collective household structure and a family deliberation system called "*Meraje – Anak Belai*," similar to the *Ninik-Mamak* concept in Minangkabau. This decision-making model reflects the traditional form of kinship-based democracy and value collectivity, which upholds the principles of equality and consensus (Arifin, 2019; Arifin, 2024; Cahyono, 2022).

All these historical facts and customary structures are an important foundation for understanding why the *rejung* has survived and functioned to this day. As part of a value system born from strong customary roots, the *rejung* is not only presented as an oral art or aesthetic expression, but as a cultural instrument in maintaining the continuity of Semende identity. Social spaces like waiting rooms, family celebrations, and discussion forums become the stage where *rejung* appears, not just to entertain, but to remind, educate, and strengthen bonds.

Rejung as a Medium for Transmitting Collective Values

In the life of the Semende community, *rejung* has a function that goes beyond ordinary oral art expression, namely as a vehicle for transmitting collective values that are consistently passed down from generation to generation. These values include social norms such as mutual cooperation, etiquette, respect for ancestors, and spirituality, which shape the way people think and act. The performance of *rejung* takes place in various social contexts such as family celebrations, and can be done in a group game (*setebah*) or individually, and is even now starting to appear on digital platforms like YouTube, without losing its original essence.

One social structure that serves as a space for value transmission is the *Tunggu Tubang* system, which is a matrilineal kinship concept where the eldest daughter is the primary caretaker of the traditional household and a symbol of family continuity (Arifin et al., 2023). This system is not only related to physical heritage, but also serves as a centre for transmitting values, including in the preservation of *rejung*. As explained by Mr. Kordin, a cultural figure and resource person from the Semende indigenous community in South OKU:

If it's the Semende tribe, the *Tunggu Tubang* belongs to the eldest daughter, while in the *Kisam* tribe, the *Tunggu Tubang* is the son, just like the *Besemah* culture and customs. But more importantly, it is in the *Tunggu Tubang* house that traditional values are taught. Including *Rejung*, it's usually chanted in that house during family traditional events or when there's a meeting.

From a structural perspective, the *rejung* is arranged in a four-line *pantun* structure. The first two lines are descriptive, containing information about the natural beauty or surrounding objects, while the next two lines convey a message or reflection on life. Another distinctive feature is the *kenjun* rhythm and the use of the open vowel "E," which differs from standard Indonesian phonetics, creating a unique musical nuance. The relationship between the verses in *Rejung* is dialogic, where the odd lines build aspiration (an initial question or statement), and the even lines respond to it. This creates a symbolic question-and-answer structure that subtly yet deeply facilitates understanding of the moral message.

Local etymology also enriches the cultural meaning of the *rejung*. According to some cultural practitioners, the word "*rejung*" can be broken down into two syllables: "*re*" meaning renewal, and "*jung*" meaning to uphold. One of the *rejung* poems shared by Mr. Kordin in the interview contains a strong Sufistic message: "*Rejung* is a family heirloom. It's not just a poem, but a reminder of life. We used to hear it at home, now the children can learn from *rejung* songs too."

In one of the poems he delivered, there is a profound spiritual message: "*Dikde payah ncakaei bilah/ Bilah ade di buat kipas/ Dikde ndak payah ncakaei Allah/ Resienye ade dalam nafas*", which means, "It is not difficult to find a blade/ A blade can be made into a fan/ Do not find it difficult to seek God, His secret lies within the breath."

Besides *pantun*, another form of *rejung* is a song with several rhythms. The rhythm in line 1 is the same as in line 3, while the rhythm in line 2 aligns with the rhythm

in the fourth line of the pantun. In rejung songs, the rhythm that emerges is the result of repetition, with only two dominant rhythms: rhythm ‘A’ and ‘B’. This repetition pattern is also evident in the various pantuns found in the song, creating a harmonious and memorable impression. For listeners, the constant rhythm provides space to reflect on the meaning while also immersing themselves in the nuances created through the lyrics.

Rejung songs always begin with a proverb. In this context, the first and second lines of the pantun contain a subtle simile that conveys a message. For example, the lyric excerpt: “*Dikde kah blak bakkan, anye luk sindiran, dikde asak gerugas...*”, which means “Not going straight to the intended point, like giving a subtle description, which could be an insinuation or something else, not conveying it directly, making the listener have to be sensitive to what the speaker means.”

Traditional games like Cingkenuing and Cang Cuit are not only a means of play, but also cognitive and social spaces where children learn language structure, rhythm, social interaction, and cooperation. In the game Cingkenuing: “Ciing kenuing keladi rantai .. lingkup jarum pancak rudai.. ikuk tupai pedang lentik cak gum cakcir.. padangan tali cepear beluduk angkiy !!... terus berulang sampai tinggal satu kaki yang terakhir = (jadi ter hukum)”. The implied meaning: “Whether playing or engaging in other activities within the family, discipline is always incorporated. To capture the participants’ interest, rhyming words with captivating rhythms were used.”

And in Cang Cuit:

*Cang cuit, cang cuit ninik minjam lading... Ndik ape gati lading? Ndik netak kemukhu gading... Ndik ape kemukhu gading? Ndik juluk anak bulan...
ndik ape anak bulan? ndik pusi'an ... (sebuat nama /sianu yang sedang bermain)...
ndik sianu (A) dikndak, ndik pusi'an sianu (B), ...(B) dikndak ...ndik pusi'an C., ...(C) dikndak ... baalik nggah (A)... mangke galak ... cuiit ..cuiit cuiit ...!*

Which means:

Cang cuit, Cang cuit. Grandmother borrows a knife

What is the knife for?

To cut the yellow bamboo

What is the yellow bamboo for?

To take the crescent moon

What is the crescent moon for?

For a toy

For A), (A) does not want it...

For (B), (B) does not want it...

For (C) as a toy,

(C) does not want it.

Returning to (A) so that (A) will want it.

Cuit... Cuit... Cuit...

Inheritance Patterns of Rejung in a Social-Communal Context

Vertical Inheritance: From Parents to Children

The vertical path is the most basic form of cultural transmission, where parents introduce rejung from an early age in an informal yet meaningful setting. Children not only absorb the lyrics but also grasp the intonation, rhythm, and social context of the performance. Rejung has become an integral part of household life, sung during celebrations or in daily activities, such as picking coffee on the farm (even if it's just whistling). As explained by Rismudin and Nuraini (Figure 1), a Semende rejung artist, he learned this tradition directly from his father through daily life filled with emotional and cultural bonds.

In practice, he plays the guitar as an accompaniment to the rejung, not just as a musical instrument, but as a medium that has become integrated into his personal cultural expression:

“The guitar isn't just a musical instrument; it's become a part of me. Playing Rejung without a guitar feels like something is missing,” (Rismudin field interview, 2023). “I once performed at a school farewell event about 60 years ago. I will never forget that moment,” (Nuraini's field interview, 2023).

Figure 1

In-Depth Interview with Rismudin and Nuraini, Rejung Artists Playing Musical Instruments



Source. Personal documentation, 2023.

Horizontal Inheritance: Among Peers

Horizontal transmission occurs in interactions between children and adolescents, particularly when they gather, play, or engage in art activities together. In the Semende

community, the rejang is not only owned by the elderly but also serves as a social practice for young people. They created new verses, recited them to each other, and played with sound and meaning in a fluid yet still valuable atmosphere.

One of the teenage informants, Gali and Riki (19 years old) “*Kadang kami belumba-lumba mbuat bait baru, mangke dinyanyikah sehempak. Ase ade ase legenyne, gi jeme kite ye kah pacak nggak ngerti pehasean itu*”. Which means: “Sometimes we compete to create new verses, and then we sing them together. It feels like having our secret that only people from Semende understand.”

Oblique Inheritance: The Role of Traditional Elders and Cultural Figures

The oblique path refers to the transmission process that occurs from figures outside the core family structure. In Semende society, this is carried out by senior wrestlers, traditional elders, spiritual figures, or local artists. They not only passed down the rejang texts, but also the contextual knowledge that includes the philosophy, community history, and life values contained within them. One of the central figures is Junaidi Albaghdadi (or “Junai”), a rejang artist who is still actively performing at various community events (Figure 2). He is known for his skill in playing the solo guitar while reciting lyrics rich in moral messages. In a performance documented in 2024, Junai presented the rejang in a dramatic style, reviving ancient stories containing advice, local wisdom, and spirituality.

Figure 2

Junaidi Albaghdadi (Junai), a Rejang Artist Playing a Solo Guitar



Source. Personal documentation, 2024.

DISCUSSIONS

Rejung as a Medium for Transmitting Collective Values

Local cultural values in the rejung are reflected in the respect for kinship structures, customs, and the Semende community's attachment to their origins (village origin, lineage, and family line). Inheritance doesn't just happen verbally, but also through symbolic relationships deeply rooted in their social systems. This strengthens the rejung as an expression of local identity passed down through generations and as a tool for preserving the community's cultural heritage. In the Tunggu Tubang house, the rejung is not only chanted for entertainment, but also as a means of reminding the younger generation about etiquette, courtesy, intergenerational relationships, and spiritual values.

The placement of the rejung in the context of social events also strengthens its pedagogical function. At wedding celebrations, the rejung is used to convey messages about married life, serving as a contemplative medium that carries spiritual values and strengthens bonds between community members. Even at community gatherings, the rejung serves as an introduction to discussions or a way to set the mood, showcasing its flexibility as a fluid and adaptable form of cultural communication. Furthermore, the inheritance of the rejung does not begin when someone reaches adulthood, but from childhood. Semende children are introduced to rhythm, rhyme, and musical structure through various folk games and stories filled with poetry or pantuns. Traditions like rimbai and pantun (spontaneous poetry) are not only introduced as entertainment, but also as part of the process of introducing language rhythm, social symbols, and cultural norms.

In this context, the rejung presents itself not merely as an art form, but as a living text containing teachings, satire, and social reflection. This poem is not only aesthetically beautiful but also carries a profound spiritual message: that divinity is not a distant entity, but is present within self-awareness. These kinds of values are integrated into the social structure of the Semende people and are conveyed in collective spaces through rejung. This phenomenon makes the rejung song structure not only aesthetically appealing but also rich in repeating patterns. Through parables, the poet or singer uses the momentum to invite listeners to grasp the hidden meaning, opening up space for broader interpretation. Language in rejung is not merely a series of rhyming words, but a cultural tool for shaping social character. He taught that not all words are meant to be sarcastic, and that emotional reactions need to be controlled for social harmony. Values like this are very important in the structure of communal societies, where harmony and relationships between individuals are maintained through polite and reflective communication. Within the framework of oral pedagogy, the rejung serves as a space for emotional learning—it not only conveys what is right, but also how to convey it wisely.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the framework of cultural values according to Koentjaraningrat (2009), which encompasses five main dimensions: moral/ethical values, social, religious, aesthetic, and local culture. In the practice of rejang, moral and ethical values are evident in the teachings of courtesy and emotional control; social values are reflected in the practice of mutual cooperation and community relations; religious values are very strong through Sufistic spiritual poetry; aesthetic values are present in the beauty of rhythm, pantun patterns, and distinctive intonation; while local cultural values are seen through respect for ancestors and origins. Rejang, in this context, becomes a cultural script that frames the way of life, thinking, and behaviour of the Semende people.

These traditions not only introduce children to linguistic expression but also teach social structures such as turn-taking, cooperation, and narrative logic. This approach aligns with the idea of guided participation from Rogoff (2006), which states that children learn most effectively when directly involved in meaningful cultural practices. Thus, the rejang is not only a cultural artifact, but a living system of knowledge that is continuously reproduced through social space, kinship structures, and the symbolic practices of the Semende community. Within the framework of ethnopedagogy, it is a real example of contextual education based on local culture, which not only preserves values but also shapes collective identity and solidarity across generations.

Patterns of Rejang Transmission in a Social-Communal Context

Vertical Transmission: From Parents to Children

The involvement of music in the chanting of rejang shows that this tradition is not only verbal but also performative. When Rismudin performed with his wife, Nuraini—who is also a pantun singer—it was evident how the rejang became a medium connecting the couple in collective cultural expression. Additionally, the rejang also serves as a trigger of memories for rejang artists. This memory shows that the rejang is not only a form of entertainment, but also a binder of memories, identity, and spiritual experiences. In this context, music and lyrics become part of a symbolic system that shapes collective memory, reinforcing the function of the rejang in maintaining the continuity of cultural values. As stated by Sapir and Whorf in their relational linguistic theory, language and culture mutually shape and direct society's worldview (Lucy, 1997).

Horizontal Transmission: Among Peers

This experience shows that the process of transmission is not just imitation, but also creation. Children and teenagers play an active role in preserving the continuity of rejang through improvisation and creative expression. They formed an exclu-

sive community of meaning, where rejang became a social language and a symbol of cultural membership. In this activity, the rejang also serves as a mechanism for social integration and community-based character education. When children compose poetry together, they learn about language structure, rhythm, empathy, and cooperation. This aligns with the concept of peer learning in critical pedagogy, where peers become effective sources and facilitators of learning.

Oblique Inheritance: The Role of Traditional Elders and Cultural Figures

The role of figures like Junai shows that the inheritance process is not only technical but also symbolic. The elders serve as guardians of collective memory and a link between generations. They don't just teach, they bring traditions to life as part of a shared experience. In this context, the process of internalising values does not occur in a one-way direction, but rather through strong symbolic and emotional experiences (Berry et al., 2011). Children who grow up in a rejang environment not only understand the text or rhythm, but also make its values a part of their way of life. Thus, the pattern of rejang inheritance in the Semende community forms a non-formal social-communal education system. It is not bound by formal institutions, but relies on intergenerational relationships, peer solidarity, and the example of cultural figures. The three lines of inheritance—vertical, horizontal, and oblique—work synergistically, making rejang not only a cultural expression but also a mechanism for education, preservation, and resistance to the homogenisation of global values. In this context, the rejang is not just a sung poem, but knowledge that is lived and passed down across generations.

Rejang as an Oral Pedagogical Practice and Cultural Resistance

In the Semende community tradition, rejang is not only present as a product of aesthetic expression, but also as a pedagogical system based on oral tradition, experience, and social relations. As part of the oral tradition, the rejang is a form of oral pedagogy transmitted through intergenerational interaction, not through formal structures or written curriculum systems. Furthermore, within the context of global cultural hegemony and the dominance of formal education systems, the practice of rejang can also be understood as a form of cultural resistance, namely an effort to maintain and reproduce local values in the face of the pressures of modernisation and the centralisation of knowledge. In practice, the rejang has a distinctive pedagogical structure. It is delivered directly, in a performative form, and takes place within a meaningful social context: during traditional council meetings, family celebrations, or children's games. Rejang poems not only contain information but also shape value

consciousness, strengthen identity, and instill the community's principles of life. Unlike the modern educational approach based on text and cognitive evaluation, rejang offers an experiential and affective learning process. Children are not taught rejang through verbal instruction, but rather through repeated symbolic exposure. They listen, observe, and then internalise meaning through active participation in cultural life. This aligns with the concept of guided participation put forward by Rogoff (2006), where children learn effectively when they are involved in socially meaningful cultural practices. Additionally, the rejang also exhibits the typical dialogical structure of critical education. Each stanza of the rejang, especially in the form of two initial lines (description) and two final lines (reflection or message), forms a narrative unit that invites the audience to contemplate, respond, and participate emotionally. This reflects the principles of dialogic pedagogy within the framework of Freire et al. (2018), which emphasizes that true education is dialogical, critical, and liberating.

As shown by Martin Nakata et al. (2012), Community knowledge is often transmitted through performative mediums that involve affection, symbolism, and action, rather than solely through text or formal instruction. This creates an action-based epistemology that is socially and culturally relevant, as reflected in the practice of rejang. The visual representation in Figure 3 shows how the rejang is brought to life in a communal atmosphere that reflects the natural pedagogical relationship between generations — where children listen, adolescents record, and elders convey values through symbolic and musical performances.

Figure 3

Rejang practice at a family wedding involving multiple generations



Source. Personal documentation, 2024.

In the process of inheritance, the rejang allows for the internalisation of social values such as collective responsibility, spirituality, and courtesy through an aesthetically pleasing form that touches the emotions. This practice is not instructional like in a classroom, but rather transactional—taking place in social spaces such as celebrations, fields, and now extending to digital platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp. Thus, rejang shapes a form of education that is contextual, participatory, and community-based. One concrete

example of Rejung's digital transformation is the presence of the Wasmi Almakmur Studio channel on YouTube, which actively uploads Rejung performances in an audio-visual format that is easily accessible to people of all generations. This channel not only documents performances but also opens up a wider space for cultural participation. The use of digital media represents multimodal enculturation, where local values and knowledge are transmitted through poetry, sound, images, and digital interaction, strengthening the vitality of traditions within the contemporary cultural ecosystem.

Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (2018) notes that digital documentation of intangible cultural heritage not only serves as an archive, but also as a new space for articulation that allows traditions to live on through participation and evolving forms of transmission. As an oral pedagogical practice, the rejung also serves as a form of cultural resistance against the national education system, which tends to marginalise local forms of knowledge. In this context, the rejung presents an alternative model for the Semende people in preserving their cultural existence. It not only teaches values but also serves as a symbolic resistance against the dominance of Western epistemology and the single narrative in modern education. This aligns with the concept of cultural articulation from Stuart Hall (1996), which states that culture is not a static entity, but rather an articulative field where social groups construct meaning and identity through symbolic practices. In practice, the rejung is not only a space for conveying moral messages, but also a means of negotiating the position of the Semende people in a rapidly changing world. When this tradition is performed in cultural forums, art festivals, or even recorded for social media content, people consciously showcase their identity as a form of cultural affirmation (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Rejung Performance by the Young Generation of Semende in a Contemporary Stage Format for Cultural Inheritance



Source. Personal documentation, 2024.

James C. Scott (1990) stating that the daily strategies employed by the community to maintain their cultural autonomy without directly clashing with the dominant power. Positioning Rejung as a paradigm of alternative education based on local culture is a recognition of the complexity of indigenous people's epistemology. Rejung is not just about cultural preservation, but also a representation of a living knowledge system—uniting values, language, sound, body, and space—as an educational method and a form of resistance against global cultural homogenisation. It is a cultural practice that preserves the vitality of community pedagogy, while also serving as a symbol of the sustainability of Semende identity in the flow of changing times.

Rejung as Local Epistemology

In Semende society, rejung does not merely function as a cultural product or expressive art. It is part of a collective knowledge system that is passed down orally and lived out in daily life. Rejung represents a local epistemology—that is, the way society recognises, understands, and explains their world through symbols, mother tongue, experiences, and spirituality embedded in cultural practices. Unlike modern epistemology, which relies on written scientific validation, local epistemology uses social space as its classroom, the body as its archive, and the mother tongue as its medium (Tsebe, 2021). In oral traditions like rejung, knowledge is not explicitly memorised, but rather internalised through experiencing and engaging with the living cultural context.

Rejung relies entirely on the strength of the mother tongue, which is the Semende language. This language is not just a medium for conveying messages, but also a cognitive structure that shapes the way we think and feel. The expressions in rejung often contain idioms, parables, and intonations that can only be understood within the local system. As explained by Kevin A. Crowley (2018), Oral societies rely on rhythm, rhyme, and repetition as memory aids and meaning-making tools. Rejung is presented in the form of four-line verses, allowing people to both remember and reflect on the message through sound and rhythm. This structure is not just about aesthetics, but is a means of mental and spiritual education. In this case, rejung is knowledge that cannot be fully transformed into written form without losing a significant portion of its cultural nuances and symbolic meaning. The mother tongue maintains context, emotional closeness, and accuracy of meaning in the transmission of values.

Rejung is not stored in books, but rather in the body and community. Rejung singers master technique, intonation, and message not through formal training, but through observation and participation in the community's social space. In this case, the body functions as an embodied archive—a place where knowledge is stored and expressed in performative form. Ritual, movement, and expression in the rejung strengthen the meaning of the poetry and deepen affection. Knowledge becomes something that is felt and done, not just known. As stated by Tim Ingold (2013), Knowing is do-

ing—to know is to act. In this context, rejung becomes an epistemic act: understanding the world through symbolic actions, not abstract theory.

Modern education systems in Indonesia often do not provide space for community-based epistemological practices. The national curriculum prioritises written literacy and grand narratives, overlooking local knowledge. This condition creates an epistemic imbalance that leads to what is called epistemicide (Santos, 2014)—the elimination of local knowledge systems due to the dominance of Western discourse. Rejung refuses to be marginalised; it remains present within the community through rituals, performances, or digital media like YouTube and WhatsApp. In this form, the rejung becomes an articulation of identity, cultural critique, and a form of epistemological resistance against the dominance of a single narrative. As stated by Hall (1996), Culture is a field of meaning articulation that is constantly negotiated. Rejung is an articulation of the living and resilient Semende knowledge system. It highlights that there is not only one way of knowing, and that knowledge can be sourced from spiritual experience, local languages, and social relationships.

Understanding rejung as a local epistemology requires us to see it not just as a cultural heritage, but as a way of thinking and a way of life. It unites language, body, spirituality, and social experience into a single, non-fragmented body of knowledge. In the rejung, education and knowledge are not separated from context; both grow within the social and symbolic space of the living community. Thus, the rejung is not only a legacy of the past, but a current life strategy—allowing the Semende people to continue to live their knowledge amidst the flow of global cultural homogenisation. In an educational climate that tends to homogenise, the rejung reminds us that true education must be rooted in the life and experiences of the community.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that rejung, as an oral tradition of the Semende people, is not merely a form of expressive art, but also a manifestation of a living and constantly evolving local knowledge system. Through its poetic structure, mother tongue, and socio-communal context, the rejung plays a dual role as a medium of oral pedagogy and cultural articulation that is resistant to the dominance of formal and global epistemologies.

Within a pedagogical framework, the rejung provides an alternative educational model that is contextual, participatory, and based on collective experience. The process of passing down the rejung through vertical (parent to child), horizontal (peer to peer), and oblique (traditional figure to community) channels reflects the strength of social relationships in the reproduction of values, ethics, and spirituality. The knowledge contained in the rejung is not conveyed instructionally, but rather through affective, performative, and symbolic engagement that is integrated into the daily lives of the community.

Epistemologically, the rejong is a form of local knowledge that does not rely on written literacy, but is stored in the body, collective memory, and cultural practices. Knowledge in rejong is narrative, reflective, and spiritual—combining cultural logic with oral aesthetics. In this regard, rejong challenges the single narrative in modern education that tends to overlook the diversity of ways of knowing and understanding the world.

Rejong also serves as a subtle yet significant form of cultural resistance. It became a platform where the Semende community voiced its existence, maintained its identity, and negotiated the meaning of life amidst the flow of cultural homogenization. Through transformation into the digital space and contemporary stage performances, Rejong demonstrates the resilience of local culture in the face of changing times without losing its epistemological roots.

This finding indicates that education and cultural policies need to create more space for community epistemologies. Rejong serves as evidence that knowledge systems based on local experience, spirituality, and mother tongues have their own validity, which is no less meaningful than formal education systems. Therefore, recognising pedagogical practices like rejong is an important step in building inclusive, contextual, and epistemically just education. In an educational climate that tends to homogenise, Rejong reminds us that true education must be rooted in the life and experiences of the community.

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