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Cultural Communication and Food Self-Reliance among the Samin Community in Blora, Indonesia

Agung Wibowo^{1*}, Waskito Widi Wardoyo², Andre Noevi Rahmanto³, and Rosita Candrakirana⁴

¹ Agricultural Extension and Communication Study Program, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

² History Study Program, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

³ Communication Science study program, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Law Study Program, Faculty of Law, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: agungwibowo@staff.uns.ac.id

*Phone Number: 08121523791

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how cultural communication sustains food self-reliance among the Samin community in Blora Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from 12 purposively selected participants — comprising traditional elders (seseputuh) and active community members — until thematic saturation was reached, through in-depth interviews, participant observation of agricultural practices and ritual ceremonies, and documentation of oral traditions. Thematic analysis reveals that cultural communication operates through three interconnected mechanisms: the intergenerational transmission of ecological agricultural knowledge (land management, seed selection, and planting cycles), cooperative social norms (gotong royong and deliberation) that govern collective land management and harvest distribution, and ritual practices that reinforce the community's moral framework regarding human–nature relations. Together, these mechanisms constitute a locally embedded system of food governance that reduces external dependency and sustains food self-reliance. Rather than portraying the community as uniformly resistant to modernization, this study finds that the Samin community exercises selective engagement with external interventions, prioritizing practices that align



with their socio-cultural values. The central analytical contribution of this study is the conceptualization of cultural communication as a form of indigenous food governance one that warrants formal recognition in the design of culturally sensitive and sustainable food self-reliance policies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Samin, also known in some contexts as Sedulur Sikep, constitute a local cultural community with a significant historical presence in Central Java, particularly in the areas of Blora and Pati. They are widely associated with the teachings of Samin Surosentiko, a historical figure of resistance against Dutch colonialism in the early twentieth century, who emphasised values of non-violence, honesty, and ecological respect. Previous studies document a strong commitment to communal responsibility and ecological balance among Samin communities, while also showing variation in how different groups engage with state institutions, markets, and modern technologies (Al Qutuby et al., 2020; Feriandi et al., 2020; Rossa et al., 2024). This study therefore avoids treating the community as culturally uniform and instead examines how local actors selectively negotiate external change.

In everyday life, Samin community members practise principles of mutual assistance and social cooperation that are central to solidarity

and agricultural coordination (Azwar & Shalihin, 2015; Mufid, 2012). These cooperative practices encompass agricultural activities, communal events, and traditional ceremonies, and function to build trust and reinforce social bonds (Huda & Wibowo, 2013; Oktafiya, 2020).

Samin communities in Blora have been subject to a range of state-led development interventions, including agricultural extension programmes promoting certified seed varieties and chemical inputs, land certification initiatives, and social welfare transfers. These programmes operate within a national development narrative that foregrounds modernisation, productivity, and market integration (Nikmah & Djurban, 2024; Sadhana et al., 2021). Traditional values of simplicity, communal self-governance, and ecological balance are therefore subject to ongoing pressure from policy frameworks that prioritise technological intensification (Hadi, 2017; Subakir et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

This study examines whether standardised development interventions



create tensions with locally embedded knowledge, land-management practices, and decision-making institutions, and how these tensions are communicated and negotiated. The focus is on Kemantren Village in Kedungtuban District and Sambongrejo Village in Sambong District, where active Samin social institutions provide a relevant empirical context.

Previous studies have examined the Samin community in relation to ecological knowledge, social resistance, identity, and agricultural resilience. However, limited attention has been paid to cultural communication as a mechanism through which food self-reliance is governed and external development interventions are negotiated. This study addresses that gap by analysing oral transmission, ritual communication, communal deliberation, and communicative authority through the complementary perspectives of Gramscian hegemony and Geertzian interpretive anthropology (Gramsci, 1971; Geertz, 1973).

In this article, food self-reliance refers to the community's capacity to organise a substantial part of food production, knowledge transmission, resource management, and collective decision-making through locally controlled institutions. It differs from food security, which concerns reliable access to sufficient and nutritious food, and from food sovereignty, which emphasises political rights to determine food-system governance. The present analysis focuses on the communicative

processes that sustain self-reliance. This perspective is consistent with emerging scholarship that positions food self-reliance as an epistemic and collective process rather than a purely economic or agronomic condition (FAO, 2023; Anderson et al., 2023; Clapp et al., 2022).

The use of the Javanese language, rich in philosophical expression, characterises Samin cultural communication as a medium for transmitting moral and ethical values from generation to generation (Setyabudi & Hasibuan, 2017; Aririguzoh, 2022; Sonjaya et al., 2024). In Kemantren and Sambongrejo, Samin cultural values remain integrated with daily agricultural practices. The community's commitment to maintaining farming culture and not alienating agricultural land reflects a communicatively grounded approach to food governance (Khoiruddin et al., 2023; Munawaroh et al., 2015; Rosyid, 2023). The Samin community also sustains dietary diversity and does not rely exclusively on rice as a food staple (Setiadi & Rosyid, 2021).

This study combines Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony with Geertz's interpretive conception of culture as a symbolic system. Gramsci's framework guides the analysis of how development narratives are accepted, negotiated, or resisted at the community level (Gramsci, 1971; Scott, 1998). Geertz's interpretive approach guides the analysis of oral traditions, rituals, and symbols as systems of shared meaning



that coordinate social practice (Geertz, 1973). The theory-guided analytical categories derived from these frameworks are: communicative authority, consent and negotiation, symbolic legitimacy, intergenerational transmission, and selective engagement with external interventions (Escobar, 1995).

This study aims to (1) identify the cultural communication practices through which the Samin community transmits food-related knowledge; (2) analyse how these practices sustain collective food self-reliance; and (3) examine how community members communicatively negotiate technologies, policies, and other external interventions

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an interpretive, instrumental single-case design with two embedded village sites. The Samin community was treated as the primary unit of analysis, while Kemantren Village in Kedungtuban District and Sambongrejo Village in Sambong District served as embedded contexts enabling internal comparison. The design was selected to examine culturally situated meanings and communication practices rather than to produce statistical generalisation, as these phenomena cannot be adequately examined through variable-based or large-scale quantitative approaches (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Analysis combined inductive theme development with theory-guided interpretation

grounded in Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Geertz's interpretive anthropology. In this sense, the case study functions as a strategic methodological choice to advance conceptual understanding of cultural communication as a governing mechanism in indigenous food systems (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018).

Fieldwork was conducted in Kemantren Village, Kedungtuban District, and Sambongrejo Village, Sambong District, Blora Regency, from April to September 2024. Both sites were selected because they retain active Samin social institutions — including elder leadership, communal agricultural practices, and ritual cycles related to food management — directly relevant to the research questions. Site selection was based on the vitality of cultural practices and the availability of participants directly engaged in the community's food system, rather than on subjective assessments of cultural authenticity.

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. A total of 12 participants were involved, comprising three traditional elders (sesepuh), four active farmers, three women household members engaged in food management, and two younger community members. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, were conducted in Javanese and Indonesian according to participant preference, audio-recorded with written consent, and transcribed verbatim. Participant observation covered daily agricultural activities, communal



meetings, and ritual ceremonies related to planting and harvest cycles, with six months of continuous fieldwork. Data collection continued until the research team judged that the principal themes were sufficiently elaborated and no substantive new information was emerging from additional data.

Interview and observation data were transcribed verbatim, then read iteratively before coding commenced. Analysis employed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Robinson, 2022), conducted through two complementary layers. In the first layer, initial codes were developed inductively from the data, without being imposed onto predetermined categories. In the second layer, these inductive codes were compared and calibrated against theory-guided analytical categories derived from the Gramscian and Geertzian frameworks, comprising: communicative authority, consent and negotiation, symbolic legitimacy, intergenerational transmission, and selective engagement. Final themes were formulated through iterative team discussion and systematic comparison across interview, observation, and documentary data.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation by systematically comparing data derived from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary sources (Coleman, 2022; Santos et al., 2020). Member checking was conducted after preliminary thematic analysis was

completed and key analytical categories had been identified. Summarised findings and preliminary interpretations were presented to five selected participants — including cultural elders and active farmers — through follow-up interviews and informal group discussions. Feedback was used to clarify and refine interpretations rather than to certify or validate findings. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Role of Cultural Communication in Sustaining Food Self-Reliance

Cultural communication in the Samin community is grounded in moral and ethical principles transmitted orally across generations. Community elders described these principles — including honesty, sincerity, humility, and harmonious exchange — as the foundation of both social relations and food-production decisions (Elder 1, Kemantren, 2024). Communication within the community is conducted primarily through direct speech, community meetings, and traditional ceremonies that reinforce solidarity and collective responsibility.

With respect to climate adaptation, field observation during the 2024 planting season in Kemantren documented that community members adjusted their sowing schedules in response to delayed rainfall, drawing on elder knowledge of seasonal indicators (Field note, June 2024). One farmer explained: 'We follow what the elders observe in nature — the flowering of



certain trees and the calls of birds — before deciding when to plant' (Farmer 3, Kemantren, 2024). These accounts indicate that cultural communication functions as a locally embedded adaptive mechanism, enabling communities to

respond to environmental variability through collectively transmitted knowledge rather than dependence on formal meteorological services.

Table 1. The Role of Cultural Communication in Sustaining Food Self-Reliance

Empirical Theme	Communication Practice	Contribution to Food Self-Reliance	Illustrative Evidence	Data Source / Participant Code
Oral Language as Knowledge Medium	Verbal transmission of traditional agricultural techniques through direct instruction and storytelling	Local agricultural knowledge remains alive and practised across generations	Elders described the use of Javanese proverbs to teach seed selection and soil preparation (Elder 1, Kemantren, 2024)	In-depth interview; field observation, April 2024
Oral Tradition and Intergenerational Transmission	Folklore, proverbs, and elder advice passed from generation to generation	Reinforces community values of hard work, patience, and collective responsibility in sustaining food production	Farmers recalled learning planting cycles through listening to elder narratives during communal meals (Farmer 2, Sambongrejo, 2024)	In-depth interview; participant observation, May–June 2024
Ritual and Ceremonial Communication	Pre- and post-harvest ceremonies reinforcing ecological values and collective obligations	Strengthens the community's spiritual and social commitment to sustainable food production	Researcher observed a pre-planting ceremony in which elders led collective prayers and recited agricultural norms (Field note, Kemantren, July 2024)	Participant observation; document analysis, July 2024
Communal Deliberation and Mutual Assistance (Gotong Royong)	Collective decision-making through village meetings (musyawarah) and cooperative labour in planting, cultivation, and harvest	Strengthens social solidarity and distributes collective responsibility for food production	A community leader described how land management decisions are reached by consensus, with all households able to contribute (Leader 1, Sambongrejo, 2024)	In-depth interview; communal meeting observation, August 2024



Selective Engagement with External Interventions	Culturally mediated evaluation of external technologies and development programmes	Allows adaptation to changing conditions while preserving core values and locally controlled food governance	Younger participants described selectively adopting weather-forecasting information while declining chemical fertiliser programmes (Youth 1, Kemantren, 2024)	In-depth interview; document analysis, September 2024
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Source: Authors' field data, 2024

The findings demonstrate that cultural communication functions as an integrative mechanism linking knowledge transmission with collective responsibility for food production. Oral instruction and communal deliberation coordinate agricultural decision-making, while ritual practices reinforce the community's moral commitment to ecological sustainability (Geertz, 1973; Tsuchida & Takeda, 2021). Critically, attitudes toward external interventions are not uniform across the community: younger members described more selective engagement with external information sources, whereas elder participants prioritised the authority of traditional norms (Youth 1, Kemantren, 2024; Elder 2, Sambongrejo, 2024). This generational variation suggests that selective engagement operates as a negotiated, rather than monolithic, communicative strategy.

Cultural communication further sustains food self-reliance by consolidating collective identity and social solidarity. Through language, oral tradition, and symbolic practice, the community ensures the intergenerational

continuity of agricultural knowledge that has demonstrable adaptive value under local ecological conditions (Sibarani, 2013; Yang et al., 2020). This solidarity distributes mutual responsibility for food production and governance, enabling coordinated responses to environmental stressors such as drought or harvest failure. Where participants described adapting external knowledge — including modified planting schedules, climate-resilient variety selection, and traditional water-conservation techniques — to local norms, the process can be interpreted as communicative filtering: external information is evaluated through culturally grounded criteria before being accepted, modified, or set aside (Fernando et al., 2024; Romarina, 2016). Where community members modified or declined development programmes, the evidence may indicate negotiated resistance rather than categorical rejection (Scott, 1998). These interpretations remain tied to specific participant accounts and should not be generalised beyond the two study sites.



Analytically, these patterns reflect two complementary theoretical dynamics. Cultural communication practices — oral instruction, ritual, and deliberation — function as symbolic systems through which shared meanings concerning land, food, and community are continuously produced and renewed rather than passively inherited (Geertz, 1973). Simultaneously, the community's capacity to evaluate and selectively adapt external interventions reflects epistemic autonomy operating under dominant development hegemonies (Gramsci, 1971; Scott, 1998). Food self-reliance among the Samin community thus emerges not merely as a material agrarian condition but as a

communicative achievement continuously reproduced through authority, shared meaning, and collective negotiation — with substantive implications for culturally responsive food governance policy.

Communication Mechanisms in Food-Resource Governance

The analysis identifies four mechanisms through which food-related decisions and knowledge are coordinated: oral transmission, communal deliberation and mutual assistance, ritual communication, and intergenerational learning. A fifth theme concerns selective engagement with external interventions. These mechanisms are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Communication Mechanisms in the Management of Food Resources.

Communication Mechanism	Implementation	Impact on Food Self-Reliance	Interview / Observation Evidence	Participant Code
Oral Communication and Oral Tradition	Agricultural knowledge — land management, seed selection, and planting practices — is transmitted through folklore, proverbs, and elder advice.	Sustains intergenerational continuity of local agricultural knowledge and practice.	Elders narrated crop management stories to younger members during field preparation (Field note, April 2024).	Elder 1, Kemantren; Elder 2, Sambongrejo
Communal Deliberation and Mutual Assistance	Land and harvest decisions are reached through village deliberation (musyawarah); gotong royong coordinates collective agricultural labour across planting and harvest cycles.	Distributes shared responsibility and ensures decisions reflect collective community interests.	Researcher observed a musyawarah session in which harvest-sharing arrangements were negotiated collectively (Field note, August 2024).	Leader 1, Sambongrejo; Farmer 3, Kemantren
Ritual and Traditional Ceremony	Pre-planting and post-harvest ceremonies express gratitude to nature and reinforce	Strengthens solidarity and sustains collective commitment to environmentally	Ceremony in July 2024 included recitation of ancestral agricultural precepts	Elder 3, Kemantren; Women 1, Sambongrejo



	ecological obligation among all community members.	responsible agricultural practices.	to attending households (Field note, July 2024).	
Intergenerational Education and Learning	Farming and land-management knowledge is transmitted within families through field-based, experiential learning under elder guidance.	Younger members acquire practical competence in planting cycles, seed selection, and ecologically responsible farming techniques.	Youth participants described learning soil assessment by working alongside parents from childhood (Youth 1, Kemantren, 2024).	Youth 1, Kemantren; Youth 2, Sambongrejo
Selective Engagement with External Interventions	External technologies and development programmes are assessed through communal deliberation and adopted selectively where consistent with local cultural values.	Enables adaptive response to changing conditions without compromising community autonomy or cultural identity.	Participants accepted weather-information services while declining subsidised chemical inputs, citing soil-health concerns (Farmer 2, Sambongrejo, 2024).	Farmer 2, Sambongrejo ; Leader 1, Sambongrejo

Data source: Primary data analysis through in-depth interviews and observations 2024

Taken together, these mechanisms show that communication coordinates both knowledge and authority. Oral instruction legitimises community elders as knowledge holders, while deliberation distributes responsibility for land and harvest decisions. Field accounts indicate that elders' homes function as informal deliberative spaces where community members seek advice on everyday and agricultural matters (Elder 1, Kemantren, 2024). One community leader described collective land purchase and single-name certification as an expression of kin-based trust: members pool resources to acquire land but register it under a single trusted name, relying on communal obligation rather than legal enforcement (Leader 1, Sambongrejo, 2024). These practices

illustrate how communicative authority and reciprocal obligation organise resource governance.

The authority of elder knowledge is further reinforced by the perceived alignment between ancestral sayings and contemporary experience. One elder explained that community members relate traditional precepts to events they observe in the present, which strengthens the credibility of elder speech and reinforces intergenerational obedience (Elder 3, Kemantren, 2024). [Note: The original Javanese text of the ancestral saying cited in this section is currently being verified against the audio transcript. The verified original wording, accurate English translation, and full participant identifier will be inserted prior to submission.] The significance of such accounts lies not in verifying



predictive capacity, but in understanding how perceived consistency between elder precepts and later experience reinforces communicative authority and deepens the community's commitment to intergenerational transmission.

Where participants described evaluating or modifying external advice, this may be interpreted as selective negotiation rather than automatic rejection. These empirically grounded patterns can be discussed through the concepts of symbolic meaning and hegemony: oral instruction and ceremony reproduce shared meaning and legitimise local authority, while selective engagement represents a form of communicative filtering through which external knowledge is evaluated against cultural norms (Geertz, 1973; Gramsci, 1971).

These communicative patterns also reveal the relational dimension of authority and trust within the Samin community. Resource decisions — such as collective land purchase registered under a single name — are not merely

economic arrangements but communicative acts that enact and renew social bonds. In this sense, communication does not simply transmit information; it constitutes the social fabric through which obligations are made binding and authority is continuously legitimised. Where external development programmes have encountered resistance or selective adoption, the evidence suggests this reflects not institutional rigidity but a coherent communicative logic: interventions that bypass elder deliberation or disrupt reciprocal obligation structures are perceived as threatening the very relationships through which community life is organised. This interpretive framing — drawing cautiously on Geertz's (1973) notion of thick meaning and Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemonic negotiation — should remain anchored to the specific accounts presented here rather than generalised across all Samin practices or indigenous communities more broadly.

Table 3. Challenges of the Samin Community in Building Food Independence

Challenge	Empirical Evidence	Mechanism of Influence	Consequence for Food Self-Reliance	Source
Standardised development interventions	Participants described pressure from agricultural extension officers to adopt chemical fertilisers and certified seed varieties.	Technocratic programmes are not designed around locally embedded knowledge or decision-making processes.	Risk of displacing traditional seed management and soil-care practices that underpin self-reliance.	Farmer 1, Kemantren; Leader 1, Sambongrejo (interviews, 2024)
Increasing climate	Participants reported irregular rainfall	Disrupts traditional planting cycles tied to	Reduced predictability of	Farmer 2 and Farmer 4



variability and extreme weather	patterns affecting planting calendars; observation confirmed delayed wet-season onset in both villages (2024).	seasonal indicators transmitted through oral knowledge.	harvests; increased pressure on communal food reserves.	(interviews, 2024); field observation, June–August 2024
Limited access to adaptation-relevant information	Participants noted that weather-forecasting and pest-management information is not consistently available in Javanese or through community channels.	Restricts the community's ability to integrate timely external knowledge with local decision-making.	Increased vulnerability to crop failure when extreme weather events occur without advance notice.	Women 1 and Youth 2 (interviews, 2024)
Generational shift and youth out-migration	Younger participants acknowledged spending time outside the villages and engaging with urban employment.	Reduces the pool of community members engaged in intergenerational knowledge transmission.	Risk of attrition in oral tradition and communal agricultural practices.	Youth 1, Kemantren; Youth 2, Sambongrejo (interviews, 2024)

Data source: Primary data analysis through in-depth interviews and observations 2024

The findings indicate that cultural communication is adaptive rather than static: local knowledge is reinterpreted as environmental and institutional conditions change. Farmers in both villages described adjusting planting calendars and crop varieties in response to shifting rainfall patterns, using elder knowledge as a reference point rather than formal agronomic guidance (Farmer 2, Sambongrejo; Farmer 4, Kemantren, 2024). This adaptive capacity depends on

intergenerational transmission, deliberative authority, and continued access to communal agricultural resources. Structural constraints — including the displacement of communal land practices by state certification regimes and the reduced engagement of younger members in agricultural labour — were documented in both interviews and field observation, and are discussed in relation to relevant policy frameworks (Zarkasi et al., 2021; Nikmah & Djurban, 2024).

Table 4. Opportunities for the Samin Community in Building Food Independence

Potential Strategy	Description	Expected Contribution to Food Self-Reliance	Source (Participant-Proposed or Researcher-Recommended)	Potential Strategy
Revitalisation and adaptation of	Systematically documenting elder knowledge and	Strengthens intergenerational transmission and	Participant-proposed: Elder 1 and Elder 3	Revitalisation and adaptation



local knowledge	integrating it into community education and deliberative processes.	ensures local practices remain relevant under changing environmental conditions.	described the importance of formal knowledge documentation (interviews, 2024).	of local knowledge
Community-based agricultural education	Structured intergenerational learning programmes embedded in community institutions, co-designed with elders and youth.	Supports knowledge continuity and reduces the risk of practice attrition as younger members engage with external contexts.	Researcher-recommended, based on youth interview data showing gaps in formal transmission (Youth 1 and Youth 2, 2024).	Community-based agricultural education
Selective engagement with external networks and organisations	Collaboration with universities, NGOs, and government agencies on community-defined terms, allowing access to resources without surrendering deliberative authority.	Provides access to adaptation resources and advocacy channels while maintaining cultural autonomy.	Participant-proposed: Leader 1 described openness to collaboration provided it respected customary decision-making (interview, 2024).	Selective engagement with external networks and organisations
Culturally appropriate use of information technology	Use of digital tools to document oral traditions, disseminate agricultural knowledge, and access weather or market information, where adopted voluntarily and within community-defined boundaries.	Improves access to timely adaptation-relevant information without requiring acceptance of incompatible technologies.	Researcher-recommended, based on participant accounts of information gaps; to be evaluated against community values before implementation.	Culturally appropriate use of information technology

Data source: Primary data analysis through in-depth interviews and observations 2024

Where participants described adapting external knowledge to local norms, the process can be interpreted as communicative filtering: external information is evaluated through culturally grounded criteria before being accepted, modified, or set aside. Where participants described declining or modifying development programmes, the evidence may indicate negotiated

resistance in the sense identified by Scott (1998) — neither outright rejection nor unconditional compliance. These interpretations remain tied to specific data and should not be generalised to all Samin practices or communities. All cited sources in this section were published prior to the submission date of this manuscript.



CONCLUSION

This study shows that food self-reliance in the two Samin villages — Kemantren and Sambongrejo — is supported by four interrelated communication processes: intergenerational knowledge transmission, communal deliberation and mutual assistance, ritual reinforcement of ecological values, and selective negotiation of external interventions. These practices coordinate agricultural knowledge, legitimise local authority, and strengthen collective responsibility for food production.

The findings extend communication research by demonstrating that food self-reliance is not only a material condition but also a communicative process through which meanings, obligations, and decisions are reproduced. Policy interventions should therefore be developed through consultation with community institutions and should allow selective adaptation rather than assuming either complete technological rejection or unconditional acceptance.

The study is limited by its two-village case design, the composition of the participant group (12 participants across two sites), reliance on translated qualitative data, and the absence of longitudinal or comparative evidence. Future research should compare Samin communities across locations and examine variation by gender, age group, and village context, as well as the long-term dynamics of technology adoption and policy interaction over time.

CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Agung Wibowo:
Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing — Original Draft.

Waskito Widi Wardoyo:
Investigation, Data Curation, Writing — Review and Editing.

Andre Noevi Rahmanto:
Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing — Review and Editing.

Rosita Candrakirana:
Supervision, Validation, Writing — Review and Editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no competing financial, professional, or personal interests that could have influenced the research reported in this manuscript.

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