

ECO-CRITICAL DIALOG: EXPLORING STUDENTS' CULTURAL VALUES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Hasanul Misbah

English Education Study Program
UIN Raden Intan Lampung

Indonesia

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Abstract

The narrative of how a modern lifestyle embedded in language brings about a fatal impact to see nature as resource for economic growth. Stibbe underlines this consumerism must be countered by cultivating ecological awareness to reshape that narrative. This study explores of how ELT students conduct an eco-dialog (Zapata, 2023) to raise their awareness and how they design posters reflecting their cultures on environmental sustainability. The study implemented a qualitative study and used the purposive sampling technique involved 18 sixth students of Ecolinguistics Course in English Department of Raden Intan State Islamic University. The eco-dialog was implemented between the students and each student's elder about traditional ecological practices. In class, the discussions occurred to compare with modern sustainability concepts and practices. The output was students designing poster with the messages about environmental caring. The findings show that eco-dialog reshapes their narrative of how they see nature based on their cultural identity and inspire them to ideas through posters for delivering the voices of nature.

Keywords: Eco-Dialog; English Language Teaching; Environmental Sustainability

Introduction

It is hugely impactful if education concerns on environment through ecolinguistics by boldly delivering the language role for enhancing people's ecological awareness and behavior (Stibbe, 2022). He underlines that it is vital to introduce any kind of discourses where educational materials and media shape ideologies about environment, economy, and consumption. Many criticisms are on the consistent promotion of unsustainable growth and consumerism. In fact, less aware people nowadays do not realize yet that the lifestyle promoted is harmful for the nature. It is shown by the daily energy uses (uses of water, electricity, etc.)

Corresponding author: hasanul@radenintan.ac.id

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Therefore, alternative narratives must be provided and shared to build the respect for nature. Language campaign that nature is not a resource but a web of life will infiltrate the people's mind and dictate a more eco-friendly self-concept and habits. At the end, the ecological literacy is achieved through critical discussion about practical frameworks by analyzing the global and surrounding nature phenomena and language patterns either harming or protecting the environment and advocating more encouraging stories that support ecological sustainability (Stibbe, 2014, 2022).

The word 'dialog' belongs to the Latin from the Greek *dialogos* with 'Dia' means through and 'logos' means 'word, 'speech', or 'reason' (Goga et al., 2023; Murfin & Ray, 2003). Though the dialog semantically varies, it is believed that the members of a dialog bring a new space of meaning between them and gather them into it because they come from different times and spaces. The dialog brings about meaning in creative tension from at least two perspectives of each member (Goga et al., 2023; Wegerif, 2013).

To reach the educational objectives of critical thinking and collaboration competence, the approach, eco-critical dialog, is promoted to take a part in the discourse of environmental sustainability. The sources of critical thinking in the discourse are literated in past and contemporary texts and in modern media and stated from the members' point of view in the dialog (Goga et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the collaboration part is done through collaboration and participation for tackling the actual problems (UNESCO, 2017).

To pursue the more eco-friendly students is derived from the systematic principles of eco-critical dialog and managed to produce the appropriate techniques. Students should notice the location where the dialogs would take place, consider the participant(s) involved in the dialog, decide the approach of dialog and the subject matter. The questions should be shared, discussed and developed in the class to achieve shared understanding and determine the ideal repertoire of dialog (Goga et al., 2023). Furthermore, the questions should represent the ideas of seeking deep insight and knowledge that the environment is a structured web of life which existence is interconnected each other, not only among human relationship but the interrelationship with other species (Goga et al., 2023; Haraway, 2016).

NatCul Matrix known as 'NaChiLitCul' founded in 2013 due to the lack of eco-critical reflection in teaching practices within a Norwegian educational setting and the emergence of dialogs among researchers and educational practitioners to concern on the humanity and environmental sustainability recommends a quality of dialog with the common mindsets closely related to the cultural perspectives about the most acceptable thought toward the nature. The dialog about the common mindsets about "what nature is", "what our position in the ecological system is or could be" and "what constitutes use or misuse of nature" and their self-actualization as a culture person to contribute to the sustainability of nature derives the major questions of dialogs between this research participants and the elder of cultures (Goga et al., 2023).

To more specific, there are 4 major questions: 1) What and how does our ethnic group perceive nature?; What is forgotten? And Why?; 3) Any local traditions, wisdom and saying related to environmental caring?; and 4) Reflected on the dialog, what should I for environmental sustainability? The data to answer the questions are separated into two sections. The first section about "The Students' Cultural Values for Environmental Sustainability" covers the question 1, 2 and 3 that focus on student-elder dialogs revealing the cultural values, traditions, wisdom, and custom for environmental sustainability. Meanwhile, the second section contains the data for question 4 referred to the students' reflection on the dialog about what they are able to contribute to the nature as the representatives of certain ethnic groups.

Methods

The qualitative research was adopted with purposive sampling techniques for the informants' selection (Creswell, 2018). The criteria of informants were: 1) the sixth semester students of English education in State Islamic University of Raden Intan Lampung; 2) enrolled in the Ecolinguistics course; 3) varied in their ethnic groups namely, Lampungnese, Javanese, Sundanese, and Palembangnese. The data were collected based on the report of eco-dialog between students (informants) and their elder(s) of ethnic groups and the interview with them to clarify and extend the information from the report. The data were analyzed by categorizing them into two sections in line with the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

The Ethnic Groups' Values and Traditions of ELT Students Toward the Nature

RHW, the Lampungnese student, through the dialog was explained that Lampung culture is very closely related to the environment. The origin of the Lampung tribe is divided into two, namely **Pesisir** (Land close to coastline or river) and **Pepadun** (located in the highlands or forests). Lampungnese for centuries live side by side with nature and perceive nature as a source of life that must always be maintained.

In addition, Lampung tribe has a guideline for living a life with several words of advice including **Sakay Sembayan (Gotong-Royong)**, a traditional custom to help relatives or neighbors who are having a celebration and to protect the nature cleanliness in the neighborhood. The proverb **Ulok Lembah Utom, Sukok Lembah Upey** (Forest is the source of Life, Water is the Source of Healing) advises the people of Lampung to have mutual relationship with the nature.

AMJ was shared that in Lampung tradition, nature is not merely a source of life—it is life itself. She reported that the way the ancestors built **Rumah Panggung** (traditional house of Lampung, with the structure of a stilt house) shows their great respect for nature. The design was elevated from the ground not only to avoid floods or animals, but also to give a sign of adapting rather than overpowering the environment. The house is also moveable by picking it up together with the neighbors as the objective is to reduce massive wood uses.

Furthermore AMJ shared the proverb "**Tanoh tumbuh ni dipetik aghi ni, bukhanhasil tanoh kemarin.**" It means that today's harvest is not from yesterday's planting. It implicitly shows that everything in nature takes time so patience and care are necessary to truly benefit from the land. The modern industrialization should have this principle to prevent the nature destruction. Any kind of actions like mining should be critically and seriously assessed whether it will harm the nature or not and what human can give in return to nature.

AFB spoke in an insightful conversation with his Javanese uncle living in Central Java. He was shared that customs are not only spiritual or social events but also acts of environmental care. It is believed that "**Sapa nandur, bakal ngunduh**", which means "Whoever plants will harvest." It serves as a powerful reminder that the earth gives back what we give to it. He was told that it is about living in harmony with the nature. One such tradition is *Nyadran*, a pre-Ramadan (Moslem Fasting Month) ritual that includes visiting ancestral graves. While today Nyadran is seen mainly as a religious and social event, it originally involved communal efforts to clean and preserve the natural surroundings of the graveyard removing weeds, picking up trash, even planting trees or flowers. A Javanese believes that "nature is like our elder. We should treat it with care, speak to it respectfully, and take only what we truly need." He furthermore

shared that this personification of nature as an elder reflects how Javanese culture teaches respect toward the earth as it does to the family members.

He found that what part of our traditions has been forgotten was the meaning behind the ritual, *Nyadran*. It is still practiced yet the part focuses on environmental stewardship often ignored. People tend to forget that these customs were not only about prayer and remembrance but also about maintaining harmony with the environment.

FLR informed the result of her dialog with her grandmother that Javanese people are taught to give life to nature, not just to take from it. Classic Javanese proverbs "*memayu hayuning bawana*" mean "we must preserve the beauty and balance of the world" and "*Alam iku kanca, dudu mungsuh*" – nature is our friend, not our enemy. She defined that nature should be respected and nurtured like our own special friend or family.". Besides *Nyadran*, as the forms of tradition, FLR were also introduced to a ceremony called '*sedekah bumi*' (earth thanksgiving) to show gratitude and respect for the Earth by doing a ritual to give the earth the fruit and food as symbol of thankfulness to the earth and then eat them together as the celebration. In some places, even some art performances like traditional dancing, *Wayang* (traditional puppet story telling show) and a walking parade around the village.

SAS mentioned the statement from the elder, "*Wong Jowo kuwi kudu ngerti meneng lan eling. Alam iku dudu duweke, tapi titipan sing kudu dijaga.*" That means a Javanese person must understand silence and mindfulness. Nature doesn't belong to us but a trust that we must protect. Humans are taught to be eling lan waspada (mindful and aware), knowing that what we do to nature will eventually return to us. She continued to share that modern people forget the wise teachings that the mountains, rivers, and trees are our siblings. Even traditions like *bersih desa* (village cleansing), *kenduri bumi* (earth offering), and *sedekah laut* (sea thanksgiving) are slowly disappearing because they are seen as outdated or irrelevant. These are not mere rituals in contrast the ancestors' ways of building the harmony with the environment. Forgetting nature stems from forgetting our roots. The proverb, "*Alam iku guru sejati; sapa sing gelem nyemak bakal ngerti urip.*" means that "Nature is the true teacher; those who are willing to listen will understand life. In Javanese philosophy, there is the concept of *memayu hayuning bawana* to beautify and preserve the harmony of the world. Caring for the environment is not just a moral obligation, but a way of life. Even in traditional puppet performances (wayang) and old Javanese poetry (tembang macapat), the stories imply many teachings about balance and respect toward nature.

SAKF, a Javanese, informed that Javanese culture in Bantul still survives although it is not as strong as it used to be. The tradition such as *gotong royong* (neighborhood working together for surrounding cleanliness) and *unggah-ungguh* (good manners) are still maintained by the community, especially in social activities such as celebrations or community service.

Fortunately still groups of young people are interested in learning Javanese culture. Some of them actively join dance studios, play the gamelan, or learn to make batik. It showed that Javanese culture has not been completely abandoned. The local proverb "*Ajiningdhiri ana ing lathi, ajining rogo ana ing busana*" remind them the importance of maintaining the local language and attitude as part of a noble cultural identity.

SW, a Palembangnese student having a dialog with the elder, mentioned the local saying of Palembangnese "*Jago alam tu cak jago diri dewek*" the means "Take care of the environment as you do to yourself". Moreover AP reflected the saying of her elder that traditionally the people of Palembang have always maintained a close relationship with nature, especially with the river (a well known Musi river) , rice paddies, and forests. Nature serves not only as a vital

resource for existence but also as a teacher of values such as patience, perseverance, and gratitude. Hence, it is essential for us to honor and protect nature rather than to harm it or overexert its resources. In the past, people tried to keep rivers clean, didn't litter, and upheld the habit of tidying up the environment. Today, many focus only on their own interests. Trash is thrown into rivers, and trees are cut down without thinking about the consequences. The importance of working together as a medium of social interaction is also diminishing. Palembangnese believes that '**water brings life, land fosters love**'. This suggests that if we take care of water and soil, nature will reward us with life and generosity. In addition, in the ulu region of Palembang, there are customs such as '*Sedekah Rame*' and '*Sedekah Sungai*'. These are traditional celebrations to express gratitude for the abundance of nature while collectively cleaning the environment.

RH a Sundanese, revealed her dialog with his grandfather that Sundanese people are taught to respect nature. Forests, rivers, and trees are not just 'places', they are family. If we destroy nature, it is the same as destroying ourselves. Traditional customs are now fading away like welcoming the rainy season, earth thanksgiving rituals, and caring for water sources as a community. Those were all expressions of gratitude and efforts to maintain environmental balance. The current generation these days have forgotten, not because they're bad, but because that form of connection to nature is fading. Many now live in cities, far from nature. Sundanese has a saying: *leuweung ruksak, cai beak, manusa binasa*. If the forest is destroyed, the water runs dry, and humans suffer.

The eco-critical dialogs between the students and the elders above revealed that a lot of important informations about the students cultural identity that engage them more with the nature. It is noted that traditional cultures across the world are vital as the potential source to reflect on shifting the focus toward what should be done for the future (Stibbe, 2022). As mentioned above eco-critical dialog provides students the platform for building critical thinking competency and collaborative competency and raising their environmental awareness (Goga et al., 2023).

Students' Self-Reflection of Roles for Environmental Sustainability

RHW became more familiar with her tribe's culture, amazed and curious to know more. She is triggered to take a simple step to continue to learn the uniqueness of her culture while increasing awareness of the importance of environment protection. She decided not to littering and reminding each other with her fellow friends. She initiated to create a poster one day in Lampung language highlighting the tradition and proverbs about environmental caring as a campaign for Lampungnese to be more aware of the heritage of culture and be more responsible with the nature they live in.

SW reflected that in her internship of the following semester she proposed to conduct the teaching about "My Green Lifestyle" with the purpose to not only educate the students about the practices of environmental caring, but also about to regenerate the care, gratitude, and responsibility for nature that has given human everything to live. She also believed that with the awareness of her cultural values toward the environment the problems in the modern era can be tackled.

SAKF underlined that due to modern lifestyle where local cultures are considered old-fashioned it is essential that they need to cultivate the pride of being a Javanese as their identity. Hence, the young generation needs to play an active role by learning Javanese, participating in traditional art activities, and building respectful communication with their elders. The cultural heritage must be passed on from to the next generation.

FLR believed that she would do simple daily habits for a change. She said that starting with the small things like wisely using plastics, planting trees and asking your friends to do it together. To be more impactful, she wants to design the teaching with kind, sincere and thoughtful words so that the younger generation follows the path. FLR said “I am not just a student yet a wide and comforting bridge between old wisdom and the current era. I somehow feel the connection among me, families and nature”

SAS realized that caring for the environment doesn't always require grand gestures or advanced technology. It can start from small acts: not littering, planting a tree, saving water. She also began to think about how to reconnect with and share these local values with my peers because cultural preservation and environmental care must go hand in hand. No great change ever starts without small, conscious steps. From the dialog, she learned that taking care of nature is not just an action, but a part of our identity and cultural heritage. Taking care of nature means taking care of ourselves, our history, and our future.

RH has been reminded that had reminded me that loving nature is not about doing something big and complex but more on the awareness and intention. Caring for the environment is not just a responsibility but part of Sundanese culture. Therefore, to protect nature is to protect our heritage, our family, and our future.

The students perspective about what they can contribute the nature would raise their eco-literacy, known as the ability to understand and apply ecological knowledge to foster sustainable living, is increasingly recognized as an essential educational objective (Kazazoglu, 2025). To sharpen the ideas and put them into practice, it is recommended that teacher training programs to provide pedagogical approaches in integrating English language teaching with the environmental caring with measureable objectives and outcomes. Particularly, it would enable them to put global issues into the contexts of ELT teaching.

Conclusion

The urgency of integrating the English language teaching with environmental values must be taken into account. Therefore, the approach, eco-critical dialog, should be the platform for the ELT students to raise their awareness about the issue of environmental sustainability through the enhancement of critical thinking and collaborative partnership. It can be concluded that eco-critical dialog considerably serves the students with a quality of conversation to reveal their true identity as the representatives of certain ethnic groups and provides them a medium to reflect about how they contributed to the nature as a human of culture.

The researcher recommends that the future issue would be about the learning output related to the ELT students that for instance produce creative learning designs or promote English public performances and competitions (poster, speech, debate, and other show formats) that connect environment, culture, and ELT and the investigations of how it works for a period of time. Those research topics might view the empirical evidence about the impact on the nature sooner or later.

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