



Greening pedagogy: Ecopedagogical approaches to English language teaching

Aman Verma^A

A

Ph.D. research scholar, The English and Foreign Languages University (Shillong Campus)

Arzuman Ara^B

B

Associate Professor, The English and Foreign Languages University (Shillong Campus)

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Abstract

In the current era of neoliberalism and globalization, the pedagogy of English studies must undergo a radical transformation. This entails integrating cultural components and reconstructing canonical paradigms to address contemporary human and environmental crises within pedagogical frameworks. Greening pedagogy advocates for climate activism, empowering learners to become eco-warriors by fostering critical consciousness about environmental issues facing our planet. In the realm of language education, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) of India asserts, "Language education is not confined to the language classroom. A science, social science, or mathematics class is ipso facto a language class" (n. p.). According to the NCF, learning a subject goes beyond acquiring knowledge; it involves understanding terminologies, grasping complex concepts, and being able to articulate and critically discuss them.

Correspondence

aman96260@gmail.com ^A

arzumanara@efluniversity.ac.in ^B

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In the educational landscape of India, English is taught in conjunction with other subjects, functioning as a medium of instruction across the curriculum. These intertwining positions underline the fact that all teaching as a form of language education, effectively bridging the gap between 'English as a subject' and 'English as a medium.' With this perspective in mind, the current study aims to focus on English studies through the lens of Ecopedagogy, utilizing it as a framework and approach to foster eco-awareness.

Adopting an analytical approach, this study seeks to apply Ecopedagogical principles to develop a curriculum for English language instruction in higher education institutions.

Introduction

There is an urgent need for English studies in India to embrace a more innovative and contextual approach in today's educational landscape. Historically, the British colonial regime significantly influenced English education in India, aiming to 'civilize' the colonized population. This strategy resulted in the establishment of rigid canonical viewpoints and often overlooked the diverse voices and challenges faced by marginalized groups.

Education must address the various forms of oppression, including those based on caste, gender, and race. It is essential to develop a curriculum that responds to these challenges and empowers learners to act. The introduction of courses such as Women's Studies, Dalit Studies, and Environmental Studies marks a significant step toward a socially relevant and inclusive educational framework. Inclusion of such courses in the field of English Studies incorporates understanding the position and reasons for the social exclusion of women, Dalit communities and environment. This makes the learners socially aware, the discipline more socially oriented and more relevant for social reformation which is the major aim and objective of education as a whole. However, environmental issues are often neglected within our educational contexts. While some courses may cover concepts related to environmental issues, they frequently fail to inspire actionable change.

Integrating environmental concerns with English studies can enhance awareness and consciousness among learners, making the curriculum more inclusive and relevant. Ecopedagogy offers a pedagogical approach that can bridge the divide between traditional English studies and contemporary global environmental challenges. By incorporating environmental themes into language instruction, this framework can empower learners to become "eco-warriors."

This research paper explores the potential for integrating Ecopedagogy with English Language Teaching (ELT) in higher education. It aims to reconcile traditional pedagogical approaches with the demands of modern education by effectively applying Ecopedagogical principles to create strategies that embed environmental concerns within the English curriculum.

Literature review

Drawing from Paulo Freire's foundational concepts in critical pedagogy, ecopedagogy underscores the intricate relationship between humans and the natural environment. It highlights the injustices and unsustainability stemming from this complex interaction, focusing on the essential connection between social justice and environmental concerns (Strauß, 2023). This approach critically examines the links between environmental degradation and social injustices, similar to how critical race theory investigates the intersections of racial inequities and other forms of oppression (Kahn, 2008).

Rooted in Latin American educational theory, particularly in the work of Paulo Freire (2000), ecopedagogy expands Freirean principles of social justice and human liberation to include ecological issues. According to Gadotti and Torres (2009) and Misiaszek (2011, 2015, 2018), ecopedagogy utilizes transformation-based teaching models in which educators critically analyse the politics of environmentally damaging actions from both local and global perspectives, drawing connections to social violence.

Freire's concept of environmental pedagogy is central to enhancing our understanding of ecopedagogy. In his posthumously published work, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004), Freire addresses the ecological crisis, asserting that ecology must be a fundamental component of any radical, critical, or liberatory educational approach. He critiques practices that harm the environment, emphasizing that such actions are fundamentally at odds with progressive educational ideals. He says:

Ecology takes on fundamental importance at the end of the 20th century. It has to be present in any radical, critical or liberationist educational practice. For this reason, it seems to me a lamentable contradiction to engage in progressive, revolutionary discourse and have a practice which negates life. A practice which pollutes the sea, water, fields, devastates forests, destroys trees, threatens birds and animals, and does violence to mountains and cities, as well as our cultural and historical memories... (pp. 46-47).

According to Richard Kahn (2008), ecopedagogy has a dual focus: it integrates Freirean aims of humanization and social justice while also prioritizing ecological conservation. Furthermore, it opposes the globalizing tendencies of neoliberalism and imperialism and emphasizes collective eco-literacy. Ecopedagogy values culturally relevant ecological knowledge—including Traditional Ecological Knowledge—and seeks to understand sustainability, planetarity, and biophilia (Kahn, 2008). As an approach, it critiques prevailing capitalist and neoliberal norms through an ecological lens and seeks to develop eco-literacy informed by global cultures that sustain life rather than destroy it. Unlike traditional environmental education, which often focuses merely on imparting information about the natural world, ecopedagogy deepens the knowledge about nature while empowering learners to devise actionable strategies to address the ongoing ecological crisis. It engages participants in activities that promote meaningful change.

As noted, ecopedagogy fosters action-oriented learning toward environmental well-being, characterized by 'praxis.' Praxis encompasses a nuanced understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Gadotti (1996) defines praxis as a dialectical concept that blends reflection and action, emphasizing that true discovery must be reflective and lead to tangible change. Freire (2000) reinforces this idea, asserting that action loses its human essence if it is disconnected from reflection and that true discovery necessitates deeper reflection to be transformative. Praxis challenges the hegemony of unjust power structures connected to environmental violence, enabling learners to recognize and understand issues of

unsustainability and oppression, while also inspiring them to take informed action. Misiaszek (2023) advocates for demystifying ecopedagogy theories in environmental teaching, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing and making these concepts relatable for a better understanding of the complexities of socio-environmental violence. Theoretical frameworks are important for broadening our understanding, but ecopedagogy ultimately emphasizes taking action to resolve the identified problems (Misiaszek & Torres, 2019).

Freire (2004) asserts that "Action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is when it is not dichotomized from reflection" (p. 53). He argues that reflection leads to discovery, which must involve action rather than mere intellectual acknowledgment. According to Gadotti (1996), education cannot be considered critical or ecopedagogical without the pursuit of praxis-oriented goals, demonstrating the necessity of implementing theories in real-world applications, such as within language education. Grigorov and Fleuri (2012) highlight the use of participatory action research and workshops as methodologies in ecopedagogy, rooted in Freire's methodologies. These methods are aimed at developing environmentally conscious communities that prioritize self-sufficiency over reliance on the ideologies of capitalism and consumerism. They propose techniques, such as 'scenarios' and 'backcasting', drawn from future studies that can be effectively employed within ecopedagogy. These scenario-based methods allow for the exploration of alternative futures based on various hypotheses, facts, and trends, providing valuable insights into potential outcomes and policy options. Prior research has begun to explore the implementation of ecopedagogy within curriculum reform across disciplines and has even developed an intensive English program under the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) framework based on these principles, focusing on students from Utah Valley University (Eyraud, 2020).

Ecopedagogy, in recent times, has emerged as an innovative educational approach rooted in critical pedagogy, emphasizing the interrelationship between ecological issues and social justice. It goes beyond traditional Environmental Studies (ES) by actively engaging learners with environmental challenges. Ecopedagogy prioritizes 'praxis,' while intertwining theory with action, empowering learners to take meaningful steps toward resolving ecological issues in fostering eco-literacy and awareness of local challenges. This literature review sets the stage for exploring how these principles can be effectively applied within English Language Education (ELE), as discussed in the subsequent sections.

Theoretical foundation

Historically, experts have played a significant role in the development of technologies that are now detrimental to cultural diversity while threatening our natural ecosystems. According to Bowers (2002), these same experts are responsible for shaping educational policies that will influence the future of societies worldwide. A central aim of education today should be to include all social groups—especially marginalized communities—in decision-making

processes. Decisions have often been confined to elite and privileged sectors of society, leaving marginalized groups without a voice, thereby adversely affecting their lives.

The necessity of including diverse social groups in educational objectives has been affirmed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). This organization primarily represents mainstream scientific and technological viewpoints. In a report from a symposium held in 1999, AAAS stressed that "decisions on scientific and technical issues should incorporate inputs from affected communities and other members of the public, as many European nations have done" (p. 2). The primary challenge lies in recognizing the connection between marginalized communities and the educational goals we establish. Currently, these goals are often framed around the individual rather than the community. Bowers (1995, 1997) argues that the notion of the individual as a rational and autonomous entity is an ideological construct rooted in Western political thought. Earlier theorists failed to adequately interpret how language processes reproduce specific patterns of thought informed by distinct cultural histories. Thus, it is crucial to recognize and embed individual perspectives within culturally relevant community approaches, which can inform a curriculum centred on democratic values. These approaches are also key to integrating marginalized communities into an Ecopedagogy-based curriculum.

An Ecopedagogy-based curriculum must reflect the interconnectedness of community and education. Learners should acquire background knowledge that fosters effective communication with the communities they study. This knowledge can be enriched through regular interactions and the sharing of perspectives between learners and these communities. Bowers (2002) emphasizes that true understanding extends beyond abstract concepts; it includes "an explicit understanding of relationships and processes, an embodied knowledge of community relationships and the ecology of place, and an awareness of the layered nature of the interdependencies of life-sustaining processes" (p. 152). To create an ecologically focused curriculum rooted in Ecopedagogy for schools and universities, educators must first assess the current knowledge of their learners. Curriculum content should stem from an understanding of interdependent communities and how these communities impact natural systems. Existing curricula must be evaluated through an ecopedagogical lens, asking critical questions: Do current environment-oriented courses cultivate awareness that leads to action? Do these courses equip learners with the skills and understanding necessary to live less consumer-dependent lives? (Bowers, 2002).

To effectively address these questions, active participation from teachers and educators in the learning process is essential. Numerous psychological and cultural forces shape learner experiences, often undermining the value of their daily lives. Therefore, educators must work to reconstruct these everyday experiences into a foundation for recognizing ecological challenges. This will enable the development of a curriculum that aligns with local contexts and cultures. Bowers (2002) notes, "the ability to explicate the patterns that contribute to morally coherent forms of community and to examine the patterns and technologies

that undermine them is also a matter of choice" (p. 156). This perspective affirms that an environment-oriented curriculum should effectively address cultural dynamics and local contexts while reflecting ecopedagogical principles.

Schubert (2009) contributes to this conversation by posing an essential question for curriculum and pedagogy: "What is worthwhile?" This inquiry complements Bowers' (2002) emphasis on community and ecological understanding. Schubert prompts us to consider, "What is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, overcoming, sharing, contributing, and wondering?" (p. 23). He et al. (2015) argue that curriculum transcends mere considerations of content delivery; it embodies a practical and philosophical framework aimed at understanding the human condition within and beyond educational contexts.

Daisaku Ikeda (2010) highlights the interconnectedness of culture and socioecological factors in his concept of global citizenship. He emphasizes the importance of wisdom, courage, and compassion as foundational attributes of humanity. For Ikeda (1991), this transformative process, which he terms "human revolution," moves individuals from isolation towards a deeper connection with the essence of the universe. This notion resonates with Bowers' emphasis on individuals as part of a larger social unit or community. Therefore, an Ecopedagogy or eco-justice-based curriculum must foster "rigorous transformation" from isolated individuals to collective identities representing their communities. The insights of Bowers, Schubert, and Ikeda challenge traditional individualistic approaches to education. They advocate for a curriculum that is community-centred and promotes meaningful teaching, integrating personal growth with ecological consciousness and awareness. These perspectives underscore the critical need for a curriculum grounded in ecopedagogical principles, which will not only enhance awareness among learners but also guide them toward more sustainable living practices.

Praxical implications

We endeavour to create a curriculum for English Studies in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) that is grounded in ecopedagogical principles. English serves as a globally recognized 'lingua franca,' but its history is intertwined with colonial rule and the dominance of hegemonic power (Errington, 2001, 2008; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phillipson, 1992, 2008). During the colonial era, English was utilized as a medium of communication to facilitate trade and interactions between colonizers and the colonized, bringing with it cultural ideologies that promoted globalization and industrialization. These ideologies often conflicted with efforts to preserve and conserve cultural and environmental values (Martusewicz et al., 2015). Scholars such as Kumaravadivelu (2006) advocate for a complete restructuring of English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in a postcolonial scenario. He asserts that "English, in its role as the global language, creates, reflects, and spreads the import and imagery of global flows" (2009, p. 1), emphasizing how English is deeply rooted in processes of consumerism, globalization, and commodification (Blenkinsop, 2012; Bowers, 1997, 2000, 2012; Goulah, 2011, 2017). Consequently, the curriculum for English studies

needs to be reimagined to be more local, contextual, and place-based.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests that restructuring ELT can draw from pedagogical and philosophical insights found in the field of environmental studies. Along similar lines, Bowers (2012) notes that "understanding how words (metaphors) reproduce earlier ways of thinking, including the silences and prejudices, is essential to the educator's craft" (p. 2). Thus, ELT can play a crucial role in fostering awareness and consciousness among learners. A place-based Ecopedagogy, integrated with "value-creative" approaches (Goulah, 2017), could effectively transcend the limitations of conventional curricula.

English Studies in India as a discipline has evolved through various phases, from the colonial imposition of the language to its recognition as one of the official languages in the Indian Constitution. The onset of globalization has further elevated the status of English, transforming pedagogy multiple times and encompassing diverse cultures in various forms.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) emphasizes the importance of bilingual and multilingual education. It states, "Language education is not confined to the language classroom. A science, social science, or mathematics class is ipso facto a language class" (p. 38). This indicates that any subject can serve as a language class, as concepts, theories, and terminologies are all conveyed through language. Consequently, learners must achieve proficiency in the language to critically engage with and discuss these concepts. The NCF specifically addresses English language education, asserting the need for learners to attain basic proficiency akin to natural language acquisition, which can be developed into a tool for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition, including literacy. This positions English as a medium integrated across curricula, bridging the gap between 'English as a language' and English as a medium of instruction.

The National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020) advocates for an educational approach that is inquiry-based, problem-posing, inclusive, and interdisciplinary. However, it does not specifically address English language learning. While the NEP encourages utilizing English for preparing teaching and learning materials in Science and Mathematics, it overlooks other domains such as ecology, environmental studies, and social sciences. Thus, it is crucial to develop a curriculum that incorporates these fields. The NEP emphasizes the importance of elective courses in Environmental Education (EE) and Environmental Studies (ES), which are essential for introducing concepts and issues related to the environment. These courses can provide a framework to enhance learners' awareness of environmental interconnections with social, political, and cultural issues. Several ecological themes and concerns, such as plastic waste, consumerism, and the exploitation of nature and natural resources, can be leveraged to cultivate awareness and consciousness among students.

Eco-curriculum for English studies

Nirajana Bardhan (2024) employs the ecological approach to writing, drawing inspiration from Van Lier's principles of ecological linguistics, as outlined in the table below. This paper utilizes these ecological principles to propose a curriculum grounded in the previously mentioned themes.

Table 1: Principles of the ecological approach adapted from Van Lier (2011).

1. Relation	a. Language use is inherently relational and context-dependent. b. Meaningful utterances connect to prior and subsequent discourses, as well as to the mental and social frameworks of the speaker. c. Consequently, the study of language necessitates an examination of this relationality.
2. Context	a. Language and context mutually shape one another, with meaning arising from linguistic expressions rather than merely being contained within them.
3. Patterns and Systems	a. Language acquisition involves understanding the organizational patterns unique to specific genres or professions, which often govern language more effectively than traditional linguistic rules.
4. Emergence	a. Language learning emerges through participation in linguistic practices rooted in local, historical, and cultural contexts.
5. Variation	a. Social and religious linguistic variations are both unavoidable and fascinating. b. Rather than striving for a set proficiency level, language education should empower learners to reflect on the identities they wish to express.
6. Agency	a. Ecological language learning prioritizes learner agency, cultivated through perceptual learning, initiative, discourse participation, and critical reflection.

Curriculum based on principles of the ecological approach

Table 2: Modules based on ecopedagogy and the ecological approach in english language teaching.

Module	Objectives	Activities	Skills Developed
1. Critical Analysis of Environmental Narratives	a. Enable learners to analyse environmental narratives across various media. b. Help learners comprehend the relational nature of language.	Learners will analyse how different media represent environmental issues (e.g., global warming, plastic waste), focusing on the language used.	a. Enhances reading comprehension. b. Fosters critical thinking skills. c. Develops the ability to critically analyse complex texts.
2.Context and Environment	a. Facilitate understanding of the relationship between context and language. b. Develop context relevant to the environment, emphasizing local communities.	Learners will compare the language used in diverse writings and speeches reflective of different contexts (e.g., social, local).	a. Improves speaking and writing abilities. b. Equips learners to critically engage with various cultural contexts.

3. Communication in Ecological Study	Introduce students to diverse writing genres within an environmental framework, such as policy documents and reports.	Students will examine various genres of environmental writing to identify patterns, followed by a writing exercise using similar themes.	a. Cultivates advanced writing skills. b. Enhances adaptability to different writing styles and patterns.
4.Environmental Engagement	Integrate language learning with active field engagement.	Students will form groups to visit local communities, subsequently creating field reports and journal entries based on their experiences.	a. Improves writing and speaking skills through real-world engagement. b. Connects learners with local socio-environmental issues.
5. Media and Environment	Foster learner agency in language acquisition through social media campaigns.	Task students with creating posters, charts, or videos for campaigns on selected environmental issues.	a. Develops creative skills. b. Enhances persuasive language skills aimed at driving social change.

This curriculum is grounded in the principles of the aforementioned ecological approach, comprising five distinct modules. Each module is designed with specific objectives that aim to enhance particular skills, all rooted in the tenets of ecopedagogy and focusing on local environmental issues. A key aspect of this curriculum is the active engagement of learners with their surrounding communities. Each module is activity-based, fostering critical understanding and awareness of environmental challenges while simultaneously advancing language skills. These modules can be integrated into existing English studies curricula or offered as elective courses in Environmental Studies at higher education institutions. Additionally, they are cross-disciplinary in nature and can be adapted for projects across various fields, including media studies.

The first module encourages learners to analyse texts, media, and other literary forms through the lens of ecopedagogical theories. The second module provides context for further exploration, which may include a focus on local areas, communities, or indigenous populations. The third module introduces a variety of media representations of ecological issues, prompting learners to recognize prevailing 'hegemonic' narratives in current systems. Armed with insights and skills acquired from these representations, learners will create reports addressing local environmental concerns. The fourth module builds upon the previous one, requiring learners to conduct field studies and compile detailed reports. The final module empowers learners to cultivate their agency in addressing and advocating for solutions to environmental challenges.

Assessment for these modules is based on field reports, journal entries, essays, and presentations. Developed holistically, the modules tackle contemporary issues and challenges. Following theoretical analysis, learners will engage in practical application, or 'praxis,' allowing them to connect theoretical concepts with real-world action. Throughout these activities, learners will also enhance their English language skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has provided an in-depth exploration of the nature of education, particularly within the realm of English studies, while emphasizing the significance of cultural and contextual factors in language learning. It has highlighted the relevance of Environmental Pedagogy, or Ecopedagogy, in today's educational landscape, arguing for its transformative potential in shaping learner attitudes toward environmental issues.

The research illustrates the intricate connections between English Language Education (ELE) and Ecopedagogy, detailing the foundational theories and principles that undergird this framework. A key focus has been the proposed development of a curriculum for English studies at the higher education level, designed explicitly in alignment with Ecopedagogical tenets. This curriculum seeks to foster a heightened sense of environmental consciousness and awareness among students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage thoughtfully with ecological issues.

Furthermore, the paper acknowledges the interdisciplinary potential of this curriculum, suggesting ways it could be integrated into various academic disciplines. This multidisciplinary approach could enrich the learning experience and broaden the impact of Ecopedagogy beyond conventional English studies. However, the implementation of this intervention faces substantial challenges, particularly the difficulty of incorporating new curricula within the existing frameworks established by educational institutions. This limitation underscores the need for flexibility and collaboration across departments to integrate elements of the ecopedagogical curriculum into diverse fields of study.

Despite these challenges, this research opens avenues for future exploration. There is significant potential for specific components of the proposed modules to be adapted and incorporated within other disciplines, fostering a collaborative approach that addresses environmental education across the academic spectrum. By merging ecopedagogy with various fields, we can cultivate a more holistic understanding of environmental issues and encourage learners to become proactive agents of change in their communities.

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