



## Introducing Nature Through Language: An Ecolinguistic Study of English Learning Materials at the Kindegarden School of the Nazhrul Asrofi Education Foundation

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana alam direpresentasikan dalam materi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang digunakan ditinhtat Taman Kanak-kanak (TK) dan mengeksplorasi nilai-nilai ekolinguistik yang tertanam didalamnya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis kartu flash, buku cerita, lagu, dan alat bantu visual yang diterapkan di Yayasan Pendidikan Nazhrul Asrofi. data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen dan observasi kelas, dan diperiksa menggunakan kerangka ekolinguistik Stibbe yang didukung oleh analisis semiotic. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa alam sering hadir dalam materi, terutama melalui penggambaran hewan, tumbuhan, dan unsur-unsur alam. Beberapa materi penyampaian nilai-nilai ekologis yang positif seperti harmoni, kepedulian, dan saling ketergantungan, sementara yang lain memperlakukan alam hanya mengubah representasi pasif menjadi pengalaman belajar ekologis yang aktif. Penelitian ini menyoroti perlunya sumber daya pengajaran Bahasa Inggris ditingkat anak usia dini agar sadar secara ekologis dan sengaja dirancang untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran lingkungan melalui Bahasa. Penelitian ini juga menekankan pentingnya keterlibatan guru dalam menafsirkan dan menyampaikan pesan-pesan ekolinguistik kepada pelajar muda.

**Kata kunci:** ekolinguistik, kesadaran lingkungan, taman kanak-kanak

### Abstract

This study investigates how nature is represented in English learning material used at the Kindegarden level and explores the ecolinguistic values embedded within them. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzed flashcards, storybooks, songs, and visual aids implemented at the Nazhrul Asrofi Education Foundation. Data were collected through document analysis and classroom observation, and examined using Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework supported by semiotic analysis. The findings revealed that nature is frequently present in the materials, especially through depictions of animals, plants, and natural elements. Some materials conveyed positive ecological values such as harmony, care, and interdependence, while others treated nature merely as decorative or neutral content. The role of teachers was found to be essential in transforming passive representations into active ecological learning experiences. This study highlights the need for English teaching resources at the early childhood level to be ecologically conscious and intentionally designed to foster environmental awareness through language. It also emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in interpreting and delivering ecolinguistic messages to young learners.

**Keywords:** ecolinguistics, environmental awareness, Kindegarden

### INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most powerful tools human possess to shape thought, culture, and behavior. In the context of early childhood education, the language children are exposed to especially through teaching materials, plays a central role in how they perceive the world around them, including the natural environment.





The development of ecolinguistics as a discipline addresses the increasing concern about the ecological crisis and the role of language in both perpetuating and challenging unsustainable ways of thinking. Ecolinguistics focuses on how language can either support ecological harmoby or contribute to environmental degradation (Fill & Muhlhauseler, 2001; Stibbe, 2015). In other words, it studies the stories we live by, narratives embedded in language that frame our relationship with nature, often unconsciously.

Children, particularly at the kindegarden level, are at formative stage where their cognitive, emotional, and etchical perceptions are still developing. The materials they encounter in the classroom, such as English flashcards, picture books, songs, and vocabulary posters, convey more than just language. These materials implicitly carry ideologies and values, including how nature is viewed, respected, and interacted with.

English language learning for young children in Indonesia, including at institutions like Nazhrul Asrofi Education Foundation, often includes basic themes such as animals, weather, fruits, colors, and seasons. While such content is commonly found in early childhood curricula, little attention has been paid to whether these materials foster environmental awareness, or simply present nature as a neutral or decorative background for human activity.

Several studies have highlighted the need to examine language materials from an ecological perspective. Stibbe (2015) argues that many educational materials reinforce anthropocentric views, placing humans above nature, rather than promoting a sense of ecological interdependence. Cameron (2003) and Moon (2000) also emphasize that children's language learning should include meaningful contexts, including exposure to values like respect for nature and empathy for other living beings.

In the Indonesia context, Fitriani (2020) analyzed primary school textbooks and found that nature is often portrayed passively, with limited encouragement for action or care. Meanwhile, Yuliani (2021) explored how nature themed English songs can promote environmental awareness in young learners, showing that meaningful exposure can shape attitudes toward sustainability from an early age.

Despite these insights, there remains a gap in research specifically targeting Kindegarten level English learning materials, especially within the growing trend of integrating English instruction into early childhood education in Islamic Foundations and private schools. This study, therefore aims to analyze the English learning materials used in the Nazhrul Asrofi Education Foundation Kindegarten school from an ecolinguistic perspective, examining how nature is introduced through language and what messages about the environment are implicitly conveyed.

By analyzing the representations of nature in these materials, the study seeks to explore how early exposure to environmental language can shape children's ecological awareness. It also aims to provide recommendations for teachers and material developers to enhance the ecological value of language aducation from an early age.

This research aims to examine English learning materials used in early childhood education, specifically within the Kindergarten program of the Nazhrul Asrofi Education Foundation, from an ecolinguistic perspective. The first objective is to explore how elements of the natural world, such as animals, plants, landscapes, and weather, are depicted in visual, textual, and audio materials used in English instruction. This includes the investigation of vocabulary items, images, songs, and stories that introduce nature-related content to young learner. In line





with Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic theory, identifying these representations will reveal underlying narratives that shape children's perceptions of nature.

Beyond surface level representation, this study will examine the implicit or explicit ecological ideologies embedded in the materials. According to Fill and Muhlhausler (2001), ecolinguistics provides a critical lens to assess whether language promotes harmony with the environment or perpetuates exploitative views. For example, whether animals are personified and respected, or reduced to passive, decorative objects.

The third objective focuses on the potential educational impact of these materials. Language used in teaching not only informs but also shapes values and attitudes (Halliday, 1990). In early childhood education, where cognitive and emotional foundations are being built, repeated exposure to nature themed content may cultivate empathy, curiosity, and respect for the environment. This study will explore how such exposure contributes to children's ecological awareness and sensitivity.

Furthermore, the findings of this study may encourage the integration of ecologically responsible themes into early English instruction, thereby aligning language education with broader goals of environmental education (UNESCO, 2017). Teachers and schools can benefit from practical recommendations on how to select or create materials that reflect ecological values in child-friendly ways.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design grounded in ecolinguistic analysis. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the objective of exploring how language used in early childhood English learning materials reflects representations of nature and carries ecological values. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is suitable when the goal is to understand social or human problems through holistic, narrative exploration of phenomena in natural settings.

Descriptive qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate how visual, verbal, and thematic content portrays the natural environment, without manipulating any variables. It emphasizes interpretative understanding, uncovering meaning, ideologies, and patterns embedded in language and images used in the classroom. This aligns with Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework, which emphasizes the role of discourse in shaping environmental ideologies through "the stories we live by."

The data for this study were collected using document analysis and classroom observation. Document analysis involved gathering and examining various English learning materials used at the Nazhirul Asrofi Kindergarten school, such as flashcards, picture books, vocabulary posters, and worksheets, to identify linguistic and visual representations of nature. Following Bowen's (2009) method, the materials were systematically reviewed to extract relevant ecological content. Additionally, non-participations, classifying them into positive or destructive ecological narratives, and interpreting their ideological significance through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Visual components were further examined using semiotic analysis as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), to explore how images support or challenge ecological awareness in early language education.



## RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

The data gathered from English learning materials and classroom observations at the Nazhirul Asrofi Kindegarten school revealed meaningful representations of nature. The findings are presented based on the research objectives: the representation of nature, ecolinguistic values, and their potential influence on students' environmental awareness.

#### 4.1.1 Representations of Nature in English Learning Materials

From the analysis of flashcards, posters, picture books, and worksheets, it was found that nature is a central theme in many instructional resources. The representations generally fall into the following categories:

- ✓ **Animals and Plants:** Vocabulary materials prominently featured animals (e.g., cat, dog, bird, fish, elephant) and plants (e.g., tree, flower, grass). These were presented with colorful illustrations and simplified labels.
- ✓ **Natural Elements:** Some worksheets and posters included representations of the sky, sun, moon, stars, clouds, and rain, helping children recognize weather and environmental conditions.
- ✓ **Environmental Settings:** In storybooks, settings like forests, rivers, gardens, and mountains served as backgrounds where characters played, learned, or interacted.

However, the representations were mostly descriptive and static, e.g., "This is bird" or "The flower is red." The deeper relationships between humans and nature were not always explicitly emphasized.

#### 4.1.2 Ecolinguistic Values in the Materials

Using Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework, the study analyzed how nature was framed ideologically. Two patterns emerged:

##### 1. Positive and Ecocentric Discourses

Several stories and songs embedded positive ecological values, such as:

- a) *Respect for animals* (e.g., a story where animals help each other)
- b) *Gratitude for nature* (e.g., songs thanking the sun or trees)
- c) *Living in harmony* (e.g., children playing gently in gardens or forests)

These align with what Stibbe terms beneficial discourses, which promote awareness of interdependence and care.

Example from a song:

"The sun is shining bright, it helps the flowers grow right."

This line encourages children to view natural elements as supportive of life.

##### 2. Anthropocentric and Decorative Discourses

In contrast, some materials used nature only as a visual background or decoration with no ecological message or interaction:

- a) Posters with animal pictures labeled only for vocabulary.
- b) Forests or rivers depicted in illustrations but with no explanation of their role.

These represent what Stibbe refers to as destructive discourses, where nature is passively objectified, with no invitation to value or protect it.



#### 4.1.3 Influence on Students' Environmental Awareness

Although the materials did not always explicitly teach ecological values, classroom observations revealed that children reacted positively to nature themed content. They smiled when shown animal pictures, mimicked animal sound, and showed interest in nature songs.

Some teachers extended the ecological meaning of the content:

- a) One teacher explained that *trees give us air to breathe*, during a lesson on plants.
- b) Another teacher asked children to “be gentle to animals,” adding an ethical message.

This shows that while the materials provide the foundation for ecological awareness, the teacher's role is vital in expanding it into environmental understanding.

## 4.2 Discussion

The findings affirm the potential of English learning materials in Kindegartens as vehicles for ecolinguistic development. While some resources already contain environmentally meaningful narratives, others remain underutilized in promoting ecological literacy.

According to Halliday (1990). Language education should be a channel for sustainability. The materials analyzed in this study reflect basic ecological representations but need enhancement to support deeper ecolinguistic values. Cameron (2003) also emphasized that early language learning is not just about vocabulary but about shaping children's worldviews, which includes their relationship with nature.

The semiotic analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of visual elements further revealed that color, size, and placement of nature related images helped highlight their importance, even when the text was minimal. However, without active explanation, children may not grasp the ecological significance. Therefore, combining intentional language use with contextual explanation is key.

This research echoes the call by UNESCO (2017) for integrating education for sustainable development from early childhood. English lessons are an opportunity not only to teach global language skills but also to plant seeds of care and awareness for the planet.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that English learning materials used at the Kindergarten school of the Nazhirul Asrofi Education foundation contain representations of nature that are visually appealing and linguistically accessible to young learners. While some material, such as songs and storybooks, incorporate positive ecolinguistic values promoting appreciation, harmony, and care for the environment many others merely depict nature as decorative elements without deeper ecological meaning. This suggests that although the potential to build environmental awareness through language learning exists, it is not yet fully utilized. The influence of these materials on student's environmental understanding largely depends on how teachers interpret and expand on them in the classroom. Therefore, it is recommended that English learning materials for early childhood education be intentionally designed to embed ecolinguistic values, highlighting interdependence between humans and nature. Teachers should also be encouraged and trained to integrate environmental narratives into daily instruction, so that language learning becomes not only a linguistic journey but also a foundation for ecological awareness from an early age.





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