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# Roots and Routes: Local Wisdom as the Pathway to Eco-ELT

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## Keywords

*Eco-ELT; local wisdom; sustainability; teachers' beliefs; teachers' readiness.*

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## Abstract

Local wisdom offers deep cultural and ecological values that can guide modern language education toward sustainability. This study investigates English teachers' beliefs and readiness in integrating local wisdom as a pathway to Eco-ELT. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 35 English teachers from various junior and senior high schools across Aceh Province. The instrument explored two main variables: teachers' beliefs about the role of local wisdom in Eco-ELT and their readiness to implement it in classroom practice. The findings reveal that most teachers (85%) strongly believe that local wisdom provides relevant and meaningful contexts for developing ecological literacy through English learning. They view traditional values, local folklore, and community-based environmental practices as powerful tools for fostering sustainability awareness among students. However, the results also indicate that only 63% of teachers feel ready to apply these ideas consistently due to limited access to teaching materials, training, and curricular support. The study concludes that teachers' strong beliefs serve as the roots of transformation in language education, while improving their readiness through professional development and resource support becomes the route toward achieving sustainable Eco-ELT practices in Aceh.

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## 1. Introduction

The speed and extent of the ecological crisis have led to many education systems across the globe to revisit their purposes and processes in recent years (Silvhiany et al., 2023). Climate change, loss of biodiversity and unsustainable consumption patterns are no longer remote; but felt realities that impact the learners' everyday life and what is expected from them in future. In this context, education is summoned not only to transfer knowledge and abilities but also to develop ecological literacy, consciousness, and responsible citizenship. English Language Teaching, also known as ELT, is a particular aspect of this more general transformation. Through texts, talks, and class communication, ELT can become a powerful context for learners to encounter environmental issues and reflect on human-nature relations as well as develop new strategies of thought and action in relation to sustainability (Hasrina et al., 2024). This approach is frequently referred to as Eco-ELT, in

which language and content informed by issues of the environment form a part of language education. Local wisdom has a significant position in Eco-ELT. Local knowledge is a collection of information, values, and practices gathered by individual or community over time from local involvement with life's activities. It is a body of oral traditions, customary laws, rituals and everyday practices that convey how people perceive and tend to the natural world. In most cultures, traditional knowledge incorporates ecologically-based principles such as care-taking of the land and water, sustainable use of natural resources, collective responsibility. Brought into the language classroom, these elements serve as culturally resonant and environmentally-grounded authentic material.

In Aceh there are various values of local wisdom imbedded in *hikayat* (old stories), legends or tradition and custom, norms and social condition, as well as socio-religious value that affect nature by the people themselves. These are the cultural resources that provide a rich bedrock for Eco-ELT. Such a context of abundant local knowledges does not, however, ensure that it will be integrated into English pedagogy (Gani et al., 2023). The teachers themselves are also at issue. Teachers determine which materials to bring in, what topics to focus on, and how learning activities should be constructed. Their convictions about the significance or insignificance of local lore and ecology in ELT form their perception of whether Eco-ELT is central or peripheral. Their uptake is, meanwhile, determined by their willingness to invoke Eco-ELT and let it action. Their readiness—the extent to which they feel competent, have resources at hand available to them, possess pedagogical skill and communicate with sympathetic institutions—determines how far we can expect them ready for action. Teachers' beliefs, in other words, are the roots of Eco-ELT and teachers' readiness is about the routes along which those roots can expand to form a practice in classroom (Akban & Yavuz, 2022). The issue that arises out of this study is the potential gap between what teachers know and what they can do in their teaching. On the one hand, English teachers in Aceh could overwhelmingly agree that local wisdom and ecological values should be integrated in language teaching, in principle. On the flip side, they may encounter practical hurdles such as a lack of suitable resources or training and curricular demands that favor testable language proficiency over content knowledge for sustainability. This gap between the ideal of Eco-ELT and practice generates a presumed dissonance that pertains to implementation challenges. Failure to acknowledge and mind this gap may leave sustainability-oriented ELT an empty symbol, not a paradigm shift.

The current study intends to examine attitudes and preparedness of English teachers for the integration of local wisdom toward Eco-ELT in Aceh Province. It tells us, for instance, the trust of teachers regarding educational usefulness of local wisdom together with Eco-ELT is and how much they are ready to use it in actual classroom. These two dimensions are worth understanding because they represent the conceptual and practical scope of Eco-ELT at school level. There are at least three reasons why this study is important. First, it adds to discussions currently taking place about the role of language education in promoting sustainability by demonstrating how ecological topics interface with local culture (Mearns & Platteel, 2021). Secondly, it offers empirical insights into teachers' views in a context rich in local wisdom yet rarely tapped into for ELT. Third, the paper provides some implications for policy-makers and teacher educators who would like to design professional development and curricular support that actually supports Eco-ELT (Zein et al., 2020).

Various aspects related to these issues have been investigated in previous work. There has been some research into the inclusion of local wisdom in schools more generally, which suggests that culture-based curriculum can improve students' identity, motivation and morality. In other research on ELT, teachers beliefs about culture has been investigated as well as their preference for local versus global materials where it was discovered that many of the respondents are aware of the significance of local content in language learning but opt for imported textbooks which don't mirror students' lived experiences (Saifulloh et al., 2025). Similarly, research has also explored the topic of environmental education in language classrooms to examine learners' favorable responses towards learning about issues related to the environment as topics for reading, writing and discussion (Kazazoglu, 2025). Moreover, readiness for innovation has been investigated in relation to teachers: research found that access to resources, prior training and perceived institutional support are factors affecting teacher-readiness (Hossain, 2024).

Notwithstanding these contributions, there is still a theoretical and empirical void in this cross-section. Very few studies specifically have investigated how English teachers simultaneously perceive local wisdom, eco-ELT, and their preparedness to teach from a sustainability perspective. Repeated reference is made to the ambivalence that typically exists between strong beliefs and low readiness, but it is not adequately defined or empirically substantiated. Towards filling this gap, this study integrates the constructs of local wisdom, Eco-ELT, teachers' beliefs and teacher readiness in one empirical work in Aceh. The novel feature is that it treats teachers' beliefs as the 'roots' and their readiness as the 'routes', which enable or obstruct integration of local wisdom into Eco-ELT. In so doing, the study doesn't just document belief and readiness levels but situates between these dimensions in tension which has implications for policy and practice.

Guided by this background, the study is driven by the following research question: *How do English teachers in Aceh perceive their beliefs and readiness in integrating local wisdom as a pathway to Eco-ELT?*

### **1.1 Literature Review**

The literature review represents the theoretical core of an article. Eco-ELT is the result of environmental education and eco-pedagogy which claim that teaching and learning should respond to ecological crisis in a manner that is critical, reflective, and action-based. In language learning and teaching, Eco-ELT involves the purposeful inclusion of environmental topics, ESD themes or ecological aspects in language skill instruction. It does not sideline the classroom to environmental slogans, but uses content to present substantive reading and listening texts or passages for discussion and writing. Eco-ELT allows learners to practice vocabulary and grammar while addressing questions about climate justice, local environmental issues and the daily habits that have an impact on ecosystems (Zainullah et al., 2023). This line of approach helps learners perceive language as a window between them and the environment, not just an academic or testable subject. Local knowledge is an important asset in this regard. It may best be understood as a flexible and context-dependent system of knowledge that combines myths, legends, rituals, customary laws and practical skills developed by communities in order to interact with an environment in a stable yet dynamic manner. The wisdom is represented in the Aceh region by stories that caution against abusing the environment for personal gain, local sustainable management of natural resources and social norms that reinforced moral conduct through a balance of managing terrestrial and equator sources (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). Pedagogically, local wisdom provides authentic materials to be translated, modified, and expanded in the English language. For instance, stories may be included as reading texts, proverbs can be employed in vocabulary and speaking activities and descriptions of traditional ecological knowledge can stimulate writing or project work. Therefore local wisdom can be integrated in ELT to prevent cultural dislocation when the material of the lessons concentrate too much on foreign texts and figures (Lorenz et al., 2021).

Another key construct in this study is the teachers' beliefs. Belief also includes teachers' beliefs, or their subjective understanding, assumptions and convictions, regarding teaching, learning and curriculum. In Eco-ELT and local wisdom, beliefs influence whether teachers acknowledge cultural and ecological content to be core or periphery in a language learning classroom (Mearns & Platteel, 2021). If instructors think that ELT should only teach grammar, and the topics of the textbook then they may avoid teaching local wisdom/lore and environmental. Yet, if they perceive language as situated within culture and social activity they can accept local resources and the issue of sustainability. Here, as in research on teacher cognition more generally, beliefs typically exert a stronger than an institutionalized curriculum-based or formal top-down influence on classroom practice. Even there where it is a required part of the curriculum, not all teachers whose personal beliefs differ from what they are teaching will necessarily conform to or indeed acknowledge local instructions (Saifulloh et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding teachers' beliefs is crucial in terms of predicting the success of Eco-ELT projects.

But ideas do not automatically lead to innovation in themselves. And this leads us to the teacher readiness construct. Readiness is the teachers' sense of being prepared, armed (with resources), and backed up for specific pedagogical activities (Hung, 2025). This involves aspects such as understanding of relevant theories, the ability to develop materials in practice, knowledge of assessment methods and exposure to teaching

resources. With Eco-ELT, you need to be ready to find or make materials that combine English language content and local ecological themes, weave sustainability into lesson plans, and handle classroom techniques that foster critical reflection. It also requires confidence in a person's own capacity to open dialogue about the environment and answer due questions from students (Baldeomar, 2025). There is some evidence for this latter interpretation in educational reform literature, which demonstrates teachers can believe in new ideas yet not act upon them because they sense a lack of knowledge and competence or fear the negative consequences of failure. The nexus between local wisdom and Eco-ELT is particularly pertinent in socially or culturally diverse settings such as Aceh. Without the infusion of local wisdom, Eco-ELT can become a foreign discourse disconnected with local realities. Grounded in the Writings of Baha'u'llah A decade after its founding, Eco-ELT is grounded on local wisdom to make a sustainable concept become understandable. Students can consider in what ways existing traditional practices already carry environmental values, and whether they align or come into conflict with contemporary environmental issues as well as what could be preserved, adapted, or critiqued. Such an integration can also be empowering, creating a sense of pride and ownership among learners who view their culture as the source of knowledge, not simply as something in need of modernization (van der Beek & Lehmann, 2024).

Thus, it is indicated that the adequate development and implementation of Eco-ELT in Aceh hinges on a synergy among teachers' beliefs and readiness as well as the way they employ local wisdom in instructional practices. Eco-ELT offers the pedagogical structure, local wisdom provides the ecological and cultural content, teachers' beliefs support it with concepts and terminology of relevance to teachers' attitude, and teachers with their readiness offer practical hands-on skills and equipment (Beer et al., 2024). The current study is an extension of these constructs, focusing on how language ideologies can be realized in the experience of life by English teachers in Aceh.

## **2. Research Methods**

This research used a quantitative descriptive design in order to portray the current condition of English teachers' beliefs and preparedness for mainstreaming local wisdom in Eco-ELT. The use of a descriptive approach was also justified as the purpose was to understand processes rather than to test causal models and establish correlations; which have conceptualised patterns, trends and perceived circumstances among teachers who can exemplify specific experiences. The survey questions were summarized into numerical form and the intent of the study was to provide some insight in terms of how such belief and readiness might be distributed as well as where possible friction can occur. This design is suitable when the research aims at a portrayal of phenomena as are, and not at experimental intervention on the frequencies, proportions and means.

The participants were 35 English teachers of junior and senior high school teachers in Aceh Province. These teachers were from a range of schools, urban and more rural. They represented different ages, duration of teaching experience and educational qualifications which ensured a broad perspective of views across the region. They were deemed to be appropriate study participants as they are the EFL teachers who plan and deliver English lessons and occupy a central role, in any local-wisdom integration effort, linked to Eco-ELT. It is from the choices they make regarding materials and teaching that will come the reality of Eco-ELT beyond a theoretical concept used as an example.

The information was obtained from a questionnaire with two main parts. The first section was related to teachers' beliefs regarding local wisdom and Eco-ELT. The third focus involved the statements on local wisdom with reference to the teaching of language, ecological contents in English lessons and its compatibility between Eco-ELT and Acehnese cultural values. Responses ranged from strong disagreement to strong agreement, captured using a Likert scale. The second section dealt with teachers' preparedness. It covered questions regarding how self-confident they felt about developing the lessons, their access to local-wisdom-based resources for language teaching, their knowledge of sustainability concepts and support they received from school management and curriculum policies. The questionnaire design facilitated a structured collection of data all participants could be compared on.

The data collection process consisted of several steps. The first contact that was established by the researcher was with school teachers, explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their consent to gather data. Once consent was obtained, the researcher administrated the questionnaire to teachers in paper format. Teachers were also told that participation was voluntary and they would remain anonymous hence responses were utilised for research purpose only. Participants had adequate time to carefully read and respond to each item. After the questionnaires were answered, responses were collected and reviewed for completeness before they were entered the analysis phase. The data analysis was done through thematic analysis after frequencies, percent and mean scores for each item were identified the overall patterns of teachers' beliefs and readiness.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The initial aim of the current study was to consider what the relationship between beliefs and readiness for integrating local wisdom as a route towards Eco-ELT (beliefs and readiness) indicates about future type practice in their class; i.e., how English teachers in Aceh see their beliefs about acquiring the readiness for incorporating local wisdom, as an aspect of pursuing Eco-ELT. Through the use of a quantitative descriptive methodology, the study sought to record the empirical state of teachers' views and probe how strongly held conceptual support can be reconciled with workaday realities. The contribution of the study is that it addresses belief and readiness concurrently, and highlights the role of local wisdom in influencing sustainability-based language education in Aceh. Methodologically, the data were obtained through a questionnaire from 35 junior and senior high school English teachers in different parts of Aceh Province. Relevance of local wisdom for Eco-ELT and readiness to run Eco-ELT in their real teaching practice were both triadically gauged. Responses were subsequently quantified with descriptive statistics in terms of the percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with belief items and those who felt sufficiently prepared to implement local-wisdom-based Eco-ELT practices. The combination of procedural clarity and descriptive analysis allowed us to report numbers that reflect the messy realities that these teachers are currently experiencing. The following graph summarizes the result.

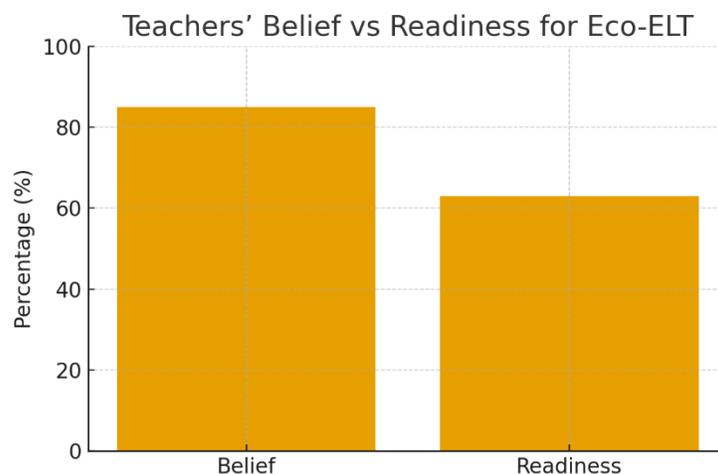


Fig. 1 Result of teachers' belief and readiness

The findings of our study revealed the following interesting pattern on the figure below; while the overwhelming majority of teachers had very strong commitment to local wisdom in Eco-ELT. That is, 85% of the participants strongly believe that local wisdom enriches the relevant and meaningful contexts for fostering ecological literacy through English study. Most of the teachers concurred that some traditional values, local mythology and community-based eco practices are good sources in teaching English where at the same time would develop students' environment awareness- and thus sustainability. They saw in Eco-ELT an approach that was "congruent" with Acehnese cultural values, and they hoped it would help to counteract a trend that

worried many educators: children growing up increasingly alienated from their local identity in an age of global media and importation of educational materials.

By contrast, when asked about their level of preparation, only 63% of teachers indicated they were prepared to implement these ideas in all or nearly everything they teach. This proportion is less than minute, but apparently smaller than the number of teachers who strongly held to strong beliefs. Comments from teachers revealed several causes of that shelving disparity. Some of the teachers complained about lack of access to instructional resources that integrate English content with indigenous knowledge and environmental issues. Others said that they did not have dedicated training on Eco-ELT or local-wisdom-based pedagogy so were left unsure of how to create lessons or assessments that captured sustainability issues appropriately. Other teachers, too, felt themselves curbed by books and tests that still test decontextualized language. While this disparity of belief and preparedness can be seen as a 'central tension' that influences the current ecology of offering Eco-ELT in Aceh. Teachers' beliefs are frequently referred to in the literature as underpinning their practices in the classroom. When these priorities are especially cherished by teachers—local knowledge integration and ecological literacy in this case—they may seize opportunities to pursue them. The result of this study proved that there is the foundation to such an extent: teachers believe in the local wisdom and Eco-ELT, and perceive them as complementary rather than contradictory with ELT goals. This is consistent with prior research that highlights the benefits of providing culturally relevant and locally situated content in promoting engagement and identity among learners. However, they also correspond to findings in the previous research that frame how structural- and practical-hindered teachers could not carry out their supported innovations. In other educational changes, teachers often say they are enthusiastic for change but underprepared as a result of being starved of resources by the introduction of new ideas. This approach contributes to this growing body of work by illustrating how that dynamic takes shape in; what can be considered as Eco-ELT and local wisdom in Aceh. The relatively low readiness scores indicate that without targeted support Eco-ELT will be a promising yet under-realized approach for some classrooms.

How to interpret the discrepancy between high levels of belief and more cautious levels of preparedness? On the one hand, this motivates to search for explanations as to why new global discourses do not influence teachers' practices (Longo, 2024). One possible explanation is that although teachers are exposed to policy documents and seminars or engage in informal discussions about local wisdom and sustainability, they are not provided with specific examples of how these can be worked out through lesson plans, class-room activities or assessment strategies (Zeng et al., 2024). Hence, they can share the objectives while being reluctant to re-impel their teaching. There is another reason, and it has to do with the control of education by standardized texts and testing (McIntosh & Feltrin, 2024). If these materials do not provide visible evidence of Eco-ELT and local wisdom, teachers might be discouraged from incorporating these contents further, as they may perceive that their effort to integrate such content will not be appreciated or rewarded, and thus back off.

The results also demonstrate similarities and differences with other research work which has investigated teachers' beliefs towards culture-based or environmental-based instruction. Consistent with those studies, this study reflects that teacher participants mostly supported the concept of local content and sustainability. They view cultural and environmental topics as adding, not distracting from linguistic learning. But the latter metaphor of roots and routes is the point taken up as particularly relevant to this study. It seems that the roots—teachers' beliefs—are solid if we consider the high proportion of strong agreement (Lestari et al., 2023). However, the pathways—the actual avenues by which Eco-ELT can be realized—are still somewhat under defined. This differentiation explains also why Eco-ELT as a concept may look appealing but it can in practice remain somewhat erratic or only half-realized. Relative to the literature on local wisdom, this study shows that local wisdom is not only ornamental in culture but also pedagogic resources and teachers are more than willing to translate it into education if given appropriate tools (Qadir et al., 2023). The teachers' great confidence in local narratives, proverbs and ecological practices indicates their awareness of the resourcefulness of these to teach the learners how to read, speak and write in English. Meanwhile, their low preparedness reflects the lack of a systematic plan for translating such potential into materials and teaching approaches. This supports the claim that activities on local to be followed by addressing month was appropriate

since policy such as those promoting local wisdom and eco-ELT must be supported with practical support like the making of teaching modules, material adaptation training for teachers, and joint designing and dissemination of resources for use.

The findings imply that closing the belief–readiness gap needs to be heavily stressed by those concerned with Eco-ELT in Aceh. If nothing changes, teachers might continue to articulate the importance of local knowledge and ecological intelligence while only marginal or episodic changes are operationalized in their classrooms. Conversely, should teacher education programs and school-based initiatives make Eco-ELT convenient, there is potential to enhance both the conceptual and practical aspects of teachers' work. Workshops, mentoring schemes or groups of practice can offer opportunities for teachers to learn how to develop localised Eco-ELT materials, try them out with students and consider their impact. The payoffs of such efforts would be not just heightened readiness, but also greater faith in Eco-ELT as teachers discover at first-hand how it benefits them and their learners.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The present study aimed to investigate how English teachers in Aceh experience their beliefs and preparedness of incorporating local wisdom as the means for pursuing Eco-ELT, and what is then understood from their relationship between those two dimensions on the likelihood of including Eco-ELT in their classrooms. The primary goal was to determine whether or not teachers see local wisdom and ecological literacy as something that they would believe in from a theoretical perspective but perhaps be unprepared to implement within daily teaching practice. They show that teachers' beliefs are incredibly robust. Of the 35 teachers, a substantial majority of them expressed that local wisdom strongly is believed to offer relevant and significant contexts for inculcating the ecological literacy via the English language learning. They believe that traditional stories, values and local environmental practices where community members learn from each other are potent tools that can help students to link global language learning with their own culture and what is around them. At the same time, their preparation is not as strong. For Eco-ELT using local wisdom only 63% teachers were ready to consistently apply the strategy. They cited inadequate teaching materials, few opportunities for teachers to be trained and curriculum pressures as principal obstacles. These findings indicate that, although teachers are conceptually in agreement with the aims of Eco-ELT, they encounter practical challenges which impede their capacity to fully implement them in their classrooms.

The impact of these findings is considerable. They also suggest that Eco-ELT devised by local wisdom is not something externally or institutionally imposed on teachers, but instead strikes at the core of their own belief systems. This is a good basis for ongoing change in education. But Eco-ELT cannot possibly be more than an ideal that few are able to put into practice unless teachers get systemic help to do it! The implication of this study is that teacher education and in-service programs should provide practical strategies for English teachers to incorporate indigenous wisdom and environmental topics into the curriculum. This will involve examples of model materials, the development of Eco-ELT task frameworks and support in ensuring that such lessons meet curriculum requirements and are test-driven. The research gap mentioned in the introduction, which is the lack of empirical research focusing on teachers' beliefs and readiness concerning local wisdom and the Eco-ELT can be filled by showing how such constructs interacted within Acehnese context. The paper shows that strong belief and high readiness do not go hand in hand, this tension needs to be explicitly addressed during the design of educational interventions. By describing beliefs and readiness as roots and routes, this study contributes to new ways of thinking about how Eco-ELT might transition from discourse into action. It is certainly not that the gap has been fully bridged; more research on classroom practices and what these practices produce in terms of student learning between those who don't look white and those who do remains needed, but we have a better sense now where some of the central problems reside.

This study is not without limitations. The sample is also small in size and coverage, consisting of only 35 teachers working at particular areas in Aceh, meaning the findings are not generalizable. A single quantitative measure also provides no opportunity for deeper qualitative understanding about the experiences of teachers and their practices in the classroom. Limitations could be compensated in future studies, including larger and

more diverse samples, mixed-method designs, and observation of the process of Eco-ELT application within classroom settings. Research may also focus on student perceptions and inquiry into how students react towards local-wisdom-based-eco-ELT activities, and the activity influences assumed to have taken place concerning students' EL level growth by observing their language learning. In light of these constraints, the findings have significant implications for studying in the future. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers design and validate Eco-ELT teaching models by integrating the local wisdom explicitly into EFL education and checking their effects on teachers and students. Teacher educators could develop training sessions tailored to Eco-ELT resource creation, reflective practice, and collaborative curriculum development. Policy makers might choose to further enshrine local wisdom and sustainability more explicitly in official ELT curriculums and allocation of resources among schools. By anchoring both the ideational foundation and instrumental path, Eco-ELT may emerge as a viable and lasting trajectory in EL education in Aceh and beyond.

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