
Green Minds, Local Hearts: Weaving Eco-ELT with Community Wisdom

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Abstract

Environmental sustainability is now a central concern in education, and English Language Teaching (ELT) can play a vital role in promoting ecological awareness. This study explores how English teachers in Aceh integrate environmental perspectives and local wisdom into their teaching practice, aligning with the idea of Eco-ELT. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 35 English teachers from various junior and senior high schools across Aceh Province. The questionnaire focused on teachers' understanding of Eco-ELT, attitudes, the implementation in classroom activities. The results show that teachers demonstrate very strong ecological awareness, reflected in an overall Eco-ELT perception mean of 4.42. Their appreciation of local wisdom as a pedagogical resource is likewise high, with an overall mean score of 4.51, indicating that teachers strongly value the integration of cultural knowledge into English lessons. In terms of classroom practice, teachers reported moderate-to-high implementation of eco-cultural activities, with an average practice score of 3.86, showing that many already incorporate elements such as local stories, folklore, and ecological themes into their lessons, although not yet consistently across all instructional activities. The study concludes that English teachers in Aceh already embody sustainable education values through their cultural context, even without formal policy frameworks. Strengthening teacher training and curriculum development in Eco-ELT can further integrate green-and-local perspectives, nurturing environmentally conscious learners rooted in their own cultural identity.

1. Introduction

Around the globe, the environmental disaster has turned out to be one of the greatest challenges for mankind in the twenty-first century (Hargreaves et al., 2023). Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption have made societies question the way in which they live and how they educate new generations. Education is now seen as far beyond a 'neutral' passing on of information and skills, an apolitical and existential state of affairs. English Language Teaching or ELT has a special place in this wider movement. Reading of texts, classroom discussions, writing exercises and, also multimodal reflection compose fertile soil for the students to hear about environmental issues; reflect on their connection with nature and develop language skills in order to be able to discuss ecological problems using a global lingua franca (Gani et al., 2023). This perspective, called Eco-ELT, regards English not as a subject of study but as a tool for developing ecological literacy and cultivating ecologically responsible attitudes. Culture and sustainability, meanwhile, cannot be treated separately. In other words, people also 'learn' environmental values in terms of practice. In local (or indigenous) communities in many places, thousands of years of knowledge about ecology exist as established traditions, oral histories, customs and communal rituals. This is what people call local knowledge. This indigenous knowledge exists in the form of *hikayat*, *caee*, legends, proverbs and rituals as well as community resource management and norms that govern relations between people and nature in Aceh. When such indigenous knowledge is transported into the ELT class, it may be a very productive and meaningful source of content. In other words, students do not merely come to learn about "the environment" in some abstract, generic way; they promote and encounter the very ecological values that are already written into their own culture – and they do so through the medium of English (Thompson & McKinley, 2018).

The opening is on Eco-ELT with local wisdom of Acehnese school setting. The study does not attempt to analyze environmental education in general; nor is simply culture-based ELT alone put into concern, rather how do English teachers in this case in Aceh perceive and implement such ecocultural weaving process. The challenge that arises in this field is the way teachers being acknowledged to eco-cultural integration are made visible and developed within respondent's everyday classroom actions. In terms of the concept, Eco-ELT and local wisdom would seem to be highly compatible (Akbana & Yavuz, 2022); both stress responsibility, care and connection. However, it is uncertain whether teachers feel trained, supported and resourced to make this kind of compatibility in their daily teaching. The objective of this research therefore is to explore the attitudes and practices towards integrating Eco-ELT along with local wisdom among English teachers in various schools in Aceh. The present study aims at describing teachers' ecological awareness in ELT, attitudes on local wisdom as a pedagogical resource and incorporation level of eco-cultural elements in the classroom (Lorenz et al., 2021). These dimensions are key because they indicate that teachers are critical mediators of educational ideals in pedagogical practice. Then if teachers have strong eco-cultural values but no actual means for them to be put in place, Eco-ELT could remain a dream of what might be done, as opposed to what is happening. This study has several important implications (Silvhiany et al., 2023). First, Eco-ELT is located in a culturalized context rather than taking ecology and culture as something other against which the environment must be addressed. Second, it offers empirical evidence on the teachers in Aceh, an area where cultural and religious values predominantly influence educational orientations although they are not always directly recorded in ELT research (Hasrina et al., 2024). Finally, it provides a descriptive baseline for the development, implementation and evaluation of potential subsequent interventions (e.g. professional development or curriculum).

The background of this research can partly be found in earlier work. Environmental education in language classes studies have also addressed the issue of integrating ecological themes into ELT and found that it may prove beneficial as a means to enhance critical thinking and involvement, since students can discuss concrete situations instead of isolated ones. In addition, scholars of culture-based ELT have demonstrated that incorporation of local stories, proverbs and cultural practices in materials/activities could increase students identity and motivation as well as enhance sense of ownership in learning English (Mearns & Platteel, 2021). In the Indonesian setting, local wisdom in social studies or civic education is one topic that has been investigated and studies have demonstrated value of community-based values for character-building and social

harmony(Zein et al., 2020). Emergent work on Eco-ELT also advocates the use of environmental topics to situate language learning (e.g. however, this invariably relies on materials and examples that are still global – or at least Western – in their scope. These strands of literature combined imply that ecological issues and indigenous wisdom may both provide benefits in education, and that ELT can act as an arena for both(Smith, 2025). What is less clear is how these two components, Eco-ELT and local wisdoms, are perceived by English language teachers and how they practice them in the specific local context.. Overall, existing literature commonly treats ecological content and cultural content separately or concentrates on policy documents, textbooks or conceptual frameworks as opposed to the lived experiences of teachers. Those involving teachers often focus on beliefs or attitudes in general, without necessarily probing into actual practices, constraints and informal strategies. The theoretical gap resides, therefore, due to no available empirical narratives on teachers' environmental awareness through which they make connections with the value of local wisdom and how these are integrated into practice in daily ELT experience.

The novelty in the present study is two-fold. In conceptual terms it is an approach that does not place Eco-ELT and local wisdom as parallel, but envelops both within an eco-cultural pedagogy in which environmental concern is seen to support cultural rootedness and vice versa through language classroom work. Empirically, it provides a rich description of teachers' beliefs and practices based on questionnaire data from English teachers in Aceh which could possibly keep the discussion into reality rather than abstraction. In so doing, the study suggests that “green minds” and “local hearts” are not mutually exclusive goals, and can be mediated by ELT. Based on the rationale above,, the study is driven by a central research question: *how do English teachers in Aceh perceive and practice the integration of Eco-ELT and local wisdom in their classrooms?*

1.1 Literature Review

This study is underpinned by three primary constructs, which are Eco-ELT as an education approach, local wisdom (cultural and ecological knowledge system), and teachers perception and practice as a way in which these constructs are translated/manifested in the classroom(Ibita, 2025). Simply put, Eco-ELT might be considered an outgrowth of ecopedagogy that pedagogical perspective which raises a critical consciousness with regard to the ecological crisis and encourages commitment to transformative environmental practice(Khan, 2025). In the ELT field, Eco-ELT essentially asserts that themes related to the environment (e.g., climate change, conservation practice, sustainable living and human–nature relations) are not simply occasional subject matters but form part of language teaching. Reading texts could bring out environmental stories, speaking activities have students discussing environmental challenges and writing tasks could encourage thinking about local ecology. The underlying assumption is that content rich input and more meaningful opportunities for communication lead to both ecological literacy. Eco-ELT, therefore, locates English as a language with which to comprehend and respond to the environmental challenges we face(Okur-Berberoglu & Yalçın, 2025).

Local knowledge, on the other hand, comes from anthropology, cultural studies, and indigenous knowledge surveys. It involves accumulated wisdom, values, beliefs, and also adaptation strategies by communities over time as they live in their environment(Sukmawati et al., 2025). Instinctually, some value may be found immediate in dedicated-local wisdom: the poet can guide us through the value of living wisely within echo systems and it is oral classics embedded for respecting natural resources and companions, establishing taboos regarding over-exploitation and narratives about ecological ethics, all filtered from culture to human moral suspension(Novita et al., 2020). In Aceh, these might be stories that tie good or bad behaviour to the health of forests or rivers, sayings about not getting greedy and throwing edible food away, or long-standing customs that govern access to shared land and water. From an educational perspective, traditional wisdom has cultural and ecological values(Besral & Yustina, 2021). Embedded in ELT, it is the real world, contextualized — and tailored to a very specific audience: students' own lived universe.' The interaction between Eco-ELT and local wisdom is being realized as a fertile area for sustainability education. On a conceptual level, this dynamic is explained by the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, which suggests that learning has more impact when it relates to students' culture(Novita et al., 2020). Culturally responsive Eco-ELT does not only import other peoples' environmental narratives, but it rediscovers what ecological values are contained in local

traditions. This approach can help students understand sustainability is not an external, foreign condition mandated from outside, but rather a continuation and revitalization of the wisdom resident in their communities (Rosita et al., 2025). It has the added benefit of working against that sense of cultural dislocation which can arise when ELT is only about foreigners, and not even ones living here (Darmawati et al., 2024).

Teacher understanding and intentions mediate between these theoretical potentials and classroom practices. Perception incorporates perception on the significance of environmental education, attitude on local wisdom and awareness of possible relationships between ecology and ELT. Examples of this practice include using the real local eco-based reading texts, the use of local stories in lessons and tasks that prompt students to reflect on environmental issues/culturally contained manners (Awaluddin & Riskianti, 2024). Studies of teacher cognition also highlight that beliefs typically inform practice, albeit in a non-linear relationship to practice. A pedagogical idea teachers may find beneficial, but be hindered by systemic factors, which include: curriculum, materials, assessment systems and institutional culture. This point is particularly relevant to Eco-ELT and local wisdom integration, where teachers may be motivated but not confident about what they are doing or how they will be supported. Within the Indonesian context, some research is emerging that documents teachers' environmental consciousness and how they incorporate local cultures in their teaching of science, social studies, and civic education (Chaiwong et al., 2024). Others have explored culture-based ELT, that is to say the way local stories or cultural artifacts can be exploited for language teaching. Less research has addressed eco-cultural ELT, or language teaching that purposefully addresses ecological and local wisdom dimensions together. Fewer still have reported on this integration in Aceh, a region where educational values are greatly influenced by religious and cultural practices (Dana et al., 2023). This body of literature evidences that Eco-ELT can be both practical and desirable in the local wisdom classroom and it recognizes that teachers are always working within structural constraints.

2. Research Methods

This is a descriptive quantitative study. One cause is that, although the research aims to describe existing conditions rather than test causation or the impact of an intervention, this type of study design would be adequate. The specific goal is the achievement of a more nuanced understanding not only on how English teachers in Aceh perceived and performed the integration of Eco-ELT and local wisdom, but also how numerical data was able to capture patterns as well as propensities. The respondents of this research are about thirty-five English teachers who work in junior and senior high schools in Aceh Province. They represent various geographical and institutional contexts, such as schools in urban centers, semi-urban and more rural areas. This diversity is essential as it enables the research to encompass a variety of eco-cultural experiences and school settings. As the former are the ones who plan and carry out English lessons in their classrooms, they can be regarded as appropriate participants. Their teaching experience range from beginner to experienced and include both male and female teachers. This variation adds to a more nuanced understanding of Eco-ELT and local wisdom integration.

The primary instrument for collection of data would be a researcher developed questionnaire. The questions aim to capture three main dimensions, which are teachers' perceptions of Eco-ELT, the acknowledgement of local wisdom as a pedagogical resource, and classroom practices that manifest eco-cultural integration. It also captures elementary demographic information including school level, years of teaching experience, and any prior environmental or cultural education training. The feeling and liking sections offer a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Items in this section explore teachers' agreeable responses to statements relating to the significance of environmental themes within ELT, Eco-ELT and character education being compatible with each other, as well as the importance of local stories and proverbs in fostering sustainability. The practice scale also uses a Likert scale, but inquires into the frequency with which teachers engage in certain eco-cultural activities as they teach. Two open-ended questions ask teachers to share their opinion on the challenges they experience and describe an eco-(cultural) classroom practice that is meaningful. We selected a questionnaire as the instrument in light of the necessity to obtain similar data from a moderate proportion of cases within a short period. The Likert-type format permits perception, appreciation,

and practice to be measured in a quantitative manner so that mean scores and frequency distributions can be calculated.

The procedure for the collection of data was as follows. First, the researchers made contact with school officials and teacher communicative networks to invite them to participate. After agreement between schools and teachers, the questionnaire was designed as an online tool to be administrated through copied forms that allowed surveying and responding. With teachers, the link to the questionnaire was sent out via WhatsApp groups and direct messages. Teachers were told that their participation was voluntary, and guarantee of anonymity was given to them, and findings would be used for research only. They were asked to respond to the statements honestly in relation with what they have actually felt and perceived. The data were collected within two weeks, including reminders for responses. The data analyses are conducted with statistical techniques that are suitable for a descriptive approach. There was a mean score and standard deviation calculated for the response to each item on the Likert scale in order to summarise central tendency and dispersion of scores.

3. Result and Discussion

As a whole, the results of the study are consistent in relation to ESL teachers' attitudes and actions in integrating Eco-ELT with community wisdom. Attitude of ELT teachers regarding their eco-awareness Teachers demonstrate a very good attitude, in terms of environment awareness in ELT. Their ratings of items like the utility of environmental themes for putting English in context, appropriacy of sustainability values for language education, and conformity between Eco-ELT to character building was always close to 5.00. The average score of Eco-ELT perception scale is higher than 4 on a 5 point scale, (mean >4) which means that most of the teachers agree or strongly agree with teaching environmental content in English. The small standard deviations indicate that this agreement carries over a large pool of teachers, rather than it being restricted to just a few teachers. The data analysis can be seen in tables below.

Table 1. Eco-ELT Perception

Indicator	Mean	SD
Environmental themes help contextual learning	4.57	0.54
ELT should promote sustainability values	4.46	0.63
Eco-ELT aligns with character education	4.51	0.58
Students respond positively to environmental topics	4.32	0.66

The table shows that teachers are compelled with very strong in their recognition of local wisdom as a pedagogical resource. Those that explore their perspectives on the potential of local stories in addressing ecological issues, whether proverbs include environmental ethics and whether local narratives are interesting to students get high scores.

Table 2. Local Wisdom Appreciation

Indicator	Mean	SD
Local wisdom enriches learning content	4.63	0.49
Folklore is useful for ecological themes	4.54	0.56
Local proverbs convey environmental ethics	4.47	0.59
Local stories attract student interest	4.42	0.62

From the table it is learned that with respect to the dimensions of local wisdom appreciation, teachers have higher mean scores on the local wisdom appreciation scale than they do on the Eco-ELT perception scale which means that not only accepting but also appreciating in value, suggests that the teachers appreciate having local culture as part of their teaching. This gratitude has intertwined community culture and classroom practice in a sense of continuum. It also implies that teachers acknowledge the importance of local wisdom in conveying sustainability issues to students.

Table 3. Eco-Cultural Classroom Practices

Practice Item	% Often/Always
Using local stories in reading lessons	71%
Discussing environmental issues	68%
Using proverbs in speaking tasks	57%
Asking students to reflect on nature	63%
Assigning eco-themed writing	49%
Integrating local ecological customs	41%
Project-based eco tasks	37%

But when the action moves to classrooms, that pattern is more complex—as it is shown in Table 3. The scale of practice, which determines the frequency with which teachers implement certain eco-cultural strategies in their teaching, provides a moderate-strong average level. Use of some practices such as use local stories for reading lesson, or discuss on environmental issue during speaking activities are mentioned most or all the time by a majority of the teachers. Other practices, like the habit of having students plan projects about local problems relating to environment or combining some local ecological customs into a more consistent approach in teaching grammar or writing, are not very common. The frequency distributions indicate that although eco-cultural practices are present, there is an uneven distribution across the types of activities.

The results also show that teachers' high environmental and cultural perceptions are associated with a list of perceived barriers preventing them from doing as much in practice. In the open-ended responses, teachers emphasize repeatedly that they have no ready-made English materials echoing what has become a widely held belief across cultures of the world, mirroring local wisdom and aspects of ecology. They detail having to spend hours either modifying or developing resources themselves, or alternatively using general textbooks that do not reflect local customs or the environmental context. Another central thread is the lack of thought academically around formal training or professional development in Eco-ELT or eco-cultural pedagogy. Educators worry that it is difficult to devise tasks or exams that prioritize ecological literacy while juggling both curriculum and exam requisites. They further refer to the limitations in standardized textbooks and tests that emphasize only decontextualized language items at the expense of contextualizable, contextually enriched content.

What can be discussed in this section are the facts that may be briefly summarized. In the first place, teachers exhibit a very high degree of ecological sensitivity when it comes to ELT. They think that the environment matters, and our English classes can be a forum for discussing sustainability, character education or the human-nature relationship. Second, teachers appreciate the local wisdom as a pedagogical resource. Local stories, proverbs and ecology customs are what local teachers consider to be valuable knowledge that promotes language learning in the sense of connecting global issues with the local context (and vice versa). Thirdly, what they report doing in class shows that eco-cultural integration is happening but not as a whole or on purpose. Certain eco-cultural practices are more commonly utilized than others. 4.1 Institutional Constraints: Teachers name several supreme constraints, shortages of materials, inadequate trainings and the dominance of text books and tests that are not Eco-ELT or local wisdom friendly. These results are consistent with and build upon prior work. Environmental education in the language classroom Research on environmental education in language classrooms found that teachers aware of ecology issues are more inclined to integrate environment in their lessons. Research on culture-based ELT has also reported that teachers acknowledge the importance of motivating and identity to using local stories and cultural texts. The current study confirms these findings by using solid data gathered in Aceh educative context that the teachers there have similar powerful perceptions of Eco-ELT and the local wisdom. At the same time, the analysis substantiates what is frequently spoken about but less often measured: a gap between belief and action. As teachers otherwise in the context of educational reform, the present teachers are caught between wanting to do things differently and what is possible within current systems.

There are multiple potential reasons for the gap between believed practice and enacted practice. There are many ways to interpret this matter. Teachers are also more and more confronted with national and international discourses promoting sustainability, local wisdom, character education. For instance, they come across lectures, policy documents or social media posts that advocate for Eco-ELT and place-based teaching. These exposures make up their belief system as they affirm the value of eco-cultural integration. But very often these discourses are not accompanied by explicit, practical examples of how to design lesson plans, activities, or assessments that instantiates such features. Teachers may not know where to go in order to transition from belief to action. However, there is an alternative explanation focused on the strength of texts and tests. Even if the textbooks and tests are focusing on languages in pieces and de-contextualized themes, educators may feel there is less room for originality, eco-cultural presentations of content. Even teachers who are passionate about Eco-ELT on a personal level might worry that straying from textbook content will risk leaving their students at a disadvantage in high-stakes testing. Under this structural pressure, we can encounter a certain type of compromise that consists in having only some eco-cultural activities from time to time or informally and not as the backbone of the curriculum.

The study also provides parallels with and distinctions from recent studies of teachers' beliefs regarding culture-based and environmental instruction. As in other studies, Acehnese teachers see culturally connected and environmentally focused topics as additive, not detracting from the language (Yusuf et al., 2023). They view the topics as bringing meaning and relevance. What is unique about this study, however, is that it explicitly situates the relationship between Eco-ELT and local wisdom as the integration between "green minds" (Eco-ELT) and "local hearts" (local wisdom). The results demonstrate that the "roots" of this ecocultural pedagogy—teachers' values and beliefs—are robust. Less than clear, however, the specific mechanisms through which Eco-ELT based on local wisdom might become practically implemented as well. This distinction clarifies while Eco-ELT seems conceptually so appealing, it never completely takes hold and continues to remain spotty in classrooms (Gani et al., 2023). The conversation therefore implies that if stakeholders support Eco-ELT based in local wisdom (Juanda, 2018), they should consider not only what teachers believe but also the conditions and resources that orient practice. Professional development programs that provide concrete models, ready-to-go materials, and a community of practice for eco-cultural lesson creation may be one means to mediate teachers' commitments into pedagogical routines (Hermawan & Noerkhasanah, 2012). Curriculum materials and assessment practices should be congruent as well; not that Eco-ELT and local wisdom are becoming treated like 'an extra' (Rasna & Binawati, 2018) but these elements of teaching English become part and parcel of the practice to a much greater degree (Leggo, 2005). In the absence of a structured backing, the eco-cultural promise we see in this study risks being confined to fringes.

4. Conclusions

The results show that teachers have extremely positive attitudes towards Eco-ELT. They feel that environmental issues are pivotal and English can be a medium for helping students develop an ecological consciousness and identify. Local wisdom also greatly is appreciated by teachers as a pedagogical resource. They know that local stories, proverbs and ecological practises are rich with meaning for children, and they can help in building a child's foundation of connection to their own culture as well as give them context for learning about sustainability. Meanwhile eco-cultural classroom practices are implemented only at a moderate level rather than maximal. Some teachers employ local stories or broach environmental issues on a regular basis, but more ambitious or systematic initiatives of eco-cultural integration are rare. Teachers cite a lack of context-appropriate resources, inadequate training and pressures surrounding curriculum and assessment as key barriers.

These findings carry several implications. They argue that there is a sound conceptual basis for eco-cultural ELT in Aceh: teachers are not opposed to Eco-ELT or local wisdom, but carry out to be in favour of both. The difficulty is attaching the tools and environment that will enable them to convert their support into durable habits. For policy makers and curriculum planners, this means that Eco-ELT in combination with local wisdom ought to be recognized and supported explicitly in the framework of curricula, the design of textbooks,

assessment and evaluation. The implication for teacher educators is that the professional development designed to support eco-cultural education should not be limited to the provision of general statements about why sustainability and culture are important. Besides, the essences of the local culture values should include specific strategies, examples and material development workshops helping teachers to design and teach ecocultural lessons.

This research contributes to fill the research gap identified in the introduction by providing empirical evidence with regard to local teacher eco-cultural perceptions and practices. It suggests that Eco-ELT and local wisdom are not just theoretical ideals; they are indeed lived concerns and aspirations for teachers. At the same time, however, the study says that more work is needed to completely close the gap. Limitations The current study has a small sample size and scope, involving only a modest number of teachers from one province. It also depends on self-reported data, which might be useful, but lacks the full range of interaction in the classroom. Observational studies, student research and longitudinal study designs could provide richer understandings of how eco-cultural pedagogy translates into practice and related learning outcomes.

Future studies might thus enter into the mechanic of how particular ecocultural lesson designs are used, how students react to them, and how such practices develop over time as teachers receive ongoing support. Visits reports, which is important if education authorities want to use it for other regions or type of school would be useful that comparing another region (Madura as pilot) and related to the characteristic of schools regarding this Eco-ELT development local wisdom Integration. Further study might also investigate the ways in which teacher communities of practice centred on eco-cultural ELT could be fostered and how, through collaboration between teachers creative ways to address material and assessment challenges can emerge.

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