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**Between Awareness and Action: Ecocritical Discourse in Pakistani  
Secondary-Level English Textbooks**



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**Abstract**

The urgency of ecological crises in the world, such as climate change, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity, has foregrounded the importance of environmental education in the formation of ecologically responsible citizens. In ESL settings like Pakistan, English textbooks at the secondary level serve as both language teaching tools and as vehicles of environmental ideology. The present research has explored the eco-pedagogical discourse of the English textbooks of Grade 9 and 10 of the Punjab Textbook Board and has examined how ESL learners perceive the environmental content of the textbooks. The study used a mixed-methods research design and employed Ecocritical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) as a methodological framework, which is grounded in the framework of Stibbe (2021) to analyze textbook discourse in five analytical categories: lexicalization, agentivity and transitivity, modality, evaluation, and framing. A structured close-ended questionnaire with 20 items on Likert-scale items was distributed among a sample of 100 secondary school students in district Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. Thematic analysis of the textbooks showed that the most common ecological content in the textbooks was related to pollution and anthropocentric themes. Eco-centric perspectives were very low in frequency. The results of the questionnaires showed that although 78 percent of students agreed that environmental content was present in their textbooks, only 40 percent of them thought that the content encouraged critical thinking among the ESL learners, and only 35 percent of them considered the content to be locally relevant to their context. Moreover, 55% of the participants said that they were motivated to take care of the environment due to their exposure to this material. All these findings indicate that despite the fact that eco-pedagogical content is available in the reviewed textbooks, it is mostly descriptive, anthropocentrically oriented, and not sufficiently based on local ecological realities, limiting the ability of learners to develop critical ecological consciousness. The research suggests a more eco-centric and contextually relevant approach to environmental content in Pakistani ESL curricula.

**Keywords:** Eco-Pedagogy, Eco-Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, ESL, Textbooks, Environmental Education, ECDA

**Introduction**

One of the most daunting challenges facing modern humanity is the environmentally degrading practices. Ecological crises such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss require urgent and concerted actions in all sectors of society, including the educational sector. Education has been long known as a key process by which people become environmentally aware and acquire ecologically responsible and sustainable dispositions. It is against this backdrop that eco-pedagogy has come out as a pedagogical paradigm that is particularly geared towards the development of ecological awareness during the learning process.

The principles of eco-pedagogy include critical inquiry, ethical reflection on environmental problems, and recognition of the inherent interdependence between human societies and natural ecosystems. Language textbooks are the main pedagogical tool in the context of ESL teaching in Pakistan and have a significant

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impact on the worldviews and value systems of learners. These texts do not simply pass on linguistic competencies; they also reproduce ideological orientations that are embedded in their discourse. As a result, the way environmental issues are presented in textbooks can significantly influence the ecological awareness of learners. Despite this, environmental education has not yet been fully institutionalized across school curricula, particularly in language education (Akhtar, 2019). The English language curriculum, especially at the secondary level, serves not only as a tool for language development but also as a medium for transmitting values, ideologies, and social messages. English textbooks, therefore, can act as subtle yet powerful vehicles for eco-pedagogical discourse, embedding messages about nature, conservation, and sustainability within reading texts, poems, and stories (Fang & Lepage, 2022). However, the extent to which such environmental themes are meaningfully represented remains underexplored in the Pakistani context. According to Fassbinder (2012), the current desperation over environmental issues needs environmental education to motivate concerned authorities to address real environmental issues. The physical reality of pollution, a climatic emergency, and the Societal systems that fuel environmental problems are all included in environmental education. Eco-pedagogy is an idealistic approach to education that seeks to eradicate all forms of violence and socio-environmental injustice (Freire, 2000). It seeks to end many socio-environmental problems and increase our students' awareness and competence. Eco-pedagogy is an ecological approach to education that emphasizes societal issues and environmental protection. Critical pedagogy, which promotes the welfare of all living things and aims to empower people as responsible earthly citizens, gave rise to eco-pedagogy (Kahn, 2010). Eco-pedagogy is an idealistic approach to education that seeks to eradicate all forms of violence and socio-environmental injustice (Freire, 2000). It seeks to end many socio-environmental problems and increase our students' awareness and competence.

Despite the recognized significance of environmental education, there was a lack of scholarly research on the incorporation of eco-pedagogical discourse in Pakistani English language textbooks at the secondary level. The current research aimed to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the discursive construction of environmental themes in the chosen textbooks and the perceptions of ESL learners towards this content, thus providing a holistic picture of eco-pedagogical practices in the Pakistani educational setting.

## **Research Objectives**

To analyze eco-pedagogical discourse in secondary-level English textbooks.

To explore ESL learners' perceptions of environmental content.

## **Research Questions**

How is eco-pedagogical discourse represented in secondary-level English textbooks?

How do ESL learners perceive environmental content?

## **Literature Review**

Eco-pedagogy grew out of the larger tradition of critical pedagogy, which is focused on the achievement of social justice, sustainability, and a more ecological consciousness. Kahn (2010) argues that eco-pedagogy urged people to question mainstream ideologies and develop a more subtle ecological awareness. Similarly, in

a similar argument, Sterling (2001) opined that sustainable education was not only about imparting knowledge but also about promoting transformational learning.

UNESCO (2017) conceptualized environmental education as the provision of knowledge, skills, and values that are necessary to achieve sustainable development. However, it was discovered that the success of environmental education largely depended on how the content was framed and presented in instructional texts. The academic literature revealed that most of the textbooks were inclined to discuss environmental issues in a very descriptive way, thus preventing the learners to develop critical thinking skills (Jacobs and Goatley, 2000).

In the context of the ESL learning environment, textbooks were far from ideologically neutral in determining the manner in which learners perceived the world. Discourse, as Fairclough (2023) argued, was a reflection of social reality and was inseparably connected with power relations. The methodological framework of the study of the role of language in mediating the relationship between human beings and the natural environment was offered by Ecocritical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) (Stibbe, 2015). Empirical research carried out in the ECDA tradition has repeatedly shown that textbook discourse on environmental issues prefigured anthropocentric issues at the cost of ecological ones.

The previous studies in the South Asian setting have shown that the environmental discourse existed in the educational resources, but it was marked by the absence of contextualization and analytical depth. Yasin et al. (2023) found a systematic bias towards increasing environmental awareness instead of developing the ability of learners to take transformative action. Abbas et al. (2025) also noted that students had a basic understanding of environmental issues, but their interactions with this material were mostly uncritical. These results highlighted the necessity to create more critically oriented eco-pedagogical discourse in the instructional resources, especially in the context of the increased urgency of ecological issues in developing nations.

The learner attitudes proved to be an important factor that predetermined the successful application of eco-pedagogical strategies. Studies showed that despite the fact that students were familiar with some environmental concepts, they never acquired a substantive and critically informed knowledge of ecological issues (Abbas et al., 2025). The current research aimed to fill this gap by combining textbook discourse analysis with a study of the perceptions of learners.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current research was based on the Ecocritical Discourse Analysis (ECDA), a sub-discipline of eco-linguistics that is based on the methodological framework created by Arran Stibbe (2021). This framework allowed studying the ways in which English language textbooks created images of the natural environment and clarified the implicit ideological meanings that were presented to learners by such texts. ECDA provided a strict analytical lens in terms of which to explore the role of language in forming attitudes towards nature and whether discursive practices supported or weakened ecologically sustainable values. The theoretical assumption was that the language used in educational texts played a constitutive role in shaping environmental ideologies and values among learners.

The paper has explored how eco-pedagogical ideas are incorporated into English textbooks assigned to the ninth and tenth grades, focusing on the main ECDA categories of analysis, such as lexicalization, agentivity and transitivity, modality,

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evaluation, and framing. The research was based on the eco-pedagogical theory, which prefigures the transformative nature of education in developing ecological awareness and promoting ethical environmental behavior in students. The study clarified the ideological and linguistic aspects of eco-pedagogical discourse and explored their impact on the attitudes of learners towards nature and environmental issues through the joint analysis of textbook material and the data of the survey of ESL learners.

## **Methodology**

The current research adopted a mixed-methods research design to explore the eco-pedagogical discourse in English textbooks used in the secondary level, and the perceptions of ESL learners towards this discourse. The ECDA was considered suitable due to its ability to enable a thorough and contextually sensitive analysis of the data and a close-ended questionnaire was adopted for exploring students' perceptions.

The main sources of data included English secondary school textbooks i.e., class 9 and 10's English textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board that included information related to environmental topics, such as pollution, conservation, and climate change, among others. In the first phase, the selected textbook was subjected to systematic screening in order to identify and extract textual content pertaining to nature and the environment. The content was categorized using a purposive selection criterion, according to which texts were included based on their explicit or implicit involvement with ecological and environmental issues. The next stage of the Ecocritical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) involved the analysis and assessment of the linguistic patterns that defined the environmental discourse in the chosen textbook to identify their eco-pedagogical value. ESL students were given a structured questionnaire to provide their views on the environmental content in these textbooks.

The study used Ecocritical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) as analytical framework. The ECDA methodology helped to identify ecological themes, ideological orientations, and discursive construction of the human-nature relationship. Thematic patterns, discursive strategies, and ideological aspects of the textual data were analyzed.

A close-ended questionnaire was used to collect data about the perceptions and awareness of secondary school level ESL learners. The questionnaire had 20 items to be responded on a 5-point Likert scale. The sample consisted of 100 students at the secondary level (Grade 9 and Grade 10) from public schools in district Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure equal representation of urban and rural schools as well as male and female students. Descriptive statistics was applied to the responses of students to the questionnaire to determine the extent of their environmental awareness, their attitudinal orientations, and the extent to which they critically engage with ecological subject matter.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The results of the research showed that the eco-pedagogical content was available in the studied textbooks, but it was not developed. The problems related to pollution, deforestation, and conservation were discussed, but they were discussed in a rather descriptive way, which did not provide much chance to develop critical thinking in learners. The general discursive stance was clearly anthropocentric, discussing the implications of environmental issues on human populations instead of the inherent

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worth and integrity of ecological systems.

The ECDA analysis of the books showed that the anthropocentric approach was dominant in all the texts, where the environmental problems were mostly discussed in the context of their implications on human welfare instead of the inherent importance of the ecological balance. This discursive orientation was identified to limit the knowledge of ecological interdependency and systems-level environmental dynamics among learners.

Another important finding was the lack of a localized approach to the treatment of environmental issues. The textbooks under analysis were mostly based on the examples of the global, not national, or regional, context, which made the material inadequately relevant to the realities of the Pakistani learners. This contextual irrelevance seemed to reduce the personal salience of the content, thus adding to the disengagement of learners.

The perception analysis of the learners revealed that students had a general understanding of environmental problems like pollution and global warming. But this awareness was mostly limited by the knowledge they received in their textbooks. Students showed little ability to critically analyze environmental problems or to use higher-order thinking skills to assess ecological problems.

**Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Textbooks**

Theme	Description	Frequency
Pollution	Air, Water, Land issues	High
Deforestation	Loss of Forest	Medium
Conservation	Resource Protection	Medium
Climate Change	Global Warming	Low
Eco-centric View	Nature-centered perspective	Very Low

As evidenced by the data presented above, pollution and anthropocentric themes were prominently represented, whereas eco-centric perspectives featured with considerably lower frequency. This distribution was found to constrain learners' opportunities to develop a holistic and ecologically grounded understanding of environmental concerns. Students' perceptions further support these findings.

**Table 2: Questionnaire Results**

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Environmental topics include	78%	12%	10%
Encourage Critical thinking	40%	30%	30%

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Locally relevant content	35%	25%	40%
Motivation to protect environment	55%	25%	20%

The data showed that although students were aware of the existence of environmental content in their textbooks, a significant percentage of them did not find this content to be locally relevant and conducive to critical engagement.

## Conclusion

The current research explored how eco-pedagogy was incorporated into ESL textbooks and what such an analysis might tell us about the discursive construction of environmental knowledge. The results showed that eco-pedagogical content was recognizable in Pakistani secondary school ESL textbooks, but it was not well-developed to help learners develop ecological consciousness. There was a strong dependence on anthropocentric which means more focus or priority is given to human interests or welfare than to attempt to inculcate the importance of nature among the students, discourses and the material was not well grounded in context, thus restricting its pedagogical effectiveness. At the same time, learners were discovered to have a level of environmental awareness that, however, did not translate into the critical engagement necessary to motivate transformative action.

The results therefore showed that the perceptions of the learners were representative of the discursive constraints that were found in the textbooks themselves. Students were aware of the presence of environmental issues, but they lacked the critical consciousness to apply this knowledge to effective ecological action.

## Recommendations

It is suggested that teachers and textbook writers should include more environmental themes relevant to students' local context in the curriculum and take a more explicitly eco-centric pedagogical stance which encourages the learners to critically engage with the environmental issues. The teaching in the classroom should focus on the development of analytical thinking, substantive academic discussion, and team problem-solving skills. Moreover, teacher education programs are highly recommended to incorporate eco-pedagogical principles and practices to improve learner engagement and develop a greater ecological literacy.

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