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## Ecotheology Values in English Education Materials

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental problems such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change require educational strategies rooted in both ethical and spiritual values. This study explores the presence of ecotheological values in English education materials used in senior high schools in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the research examines English textbooks used nationally in Indonesia to identify themes related to environmental stewardship, ethical responsibility toward nature, and spiritual engagement with the environment. The findings reveal that environmental issues are only addressed in the second-grade English textbook, while the theological values here are largely implicit and rarely emphasized. Most texts present environmental content from scientific or practical perspectives, with limited integration of theological or ethical frameworks. This suggests an opportunity to foster ecological awareness and character development through English education. The study recommends a more intentional inclusion of ecotheological values in English language teaching to support holistic environmental education aligned with national character-building goals. By embedding ecotheological values, English learning can serve not only linguistic development but also moral and environmental consciousness. This integration may also strengthen the relevance of English education to local cultural and religious contexts.

**Key Words:** *ecotheology, environment, education*

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### INTRODUCTION

Global environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and environmental degradation require educational strategies that provide basic understanding of environmental awareness. Education plays a crucial role in shaping learners' values, attitudes, and character, particularly in addressing ecological crises. Therefore, education's role can take part in environmental awareness. Materials that are related to environmental issues can be a strategy to foster environmental responsibility among learners.

In Indonesia, where religious values strongly influence social and educational life, ecotheology offers a relevant perspective for environmental education. Ecotheology emphasizes the interconnected relationship between God, humans, and nature, positioning environmental stewardship as a moral obligation (Rahman et al., 2025; Prakoso, 2025). Previous studies have extensively explored ecological ethics within Islamic religious education and pesantren-based learning environments (Rohmah, 2024; Muhyidin et al., 2025). However, research on the integration of ecotheological values within English language teaching (ELT), particularly through government-issued textbooks for senior high schools, remains limited.

Ecotheology is a theological approach that views nature as part of divine creation and emphasizes human responsibility for environmental preservation. Within educational contexts, ecotheology contributes to the development of ecological ethics and sustainability-oriented character education (Rahman et al., 2025; Rohmah, 2024). Studies on Islamic education textbooks demonstrate that integrating ecological ethics can positively influence students' environmental awareness and moral development (Muhyidin et al., 2025).

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English language education provides a strategic platform for embedding environmental and moral values, as ELT materials often address global and contextual issues. This study aims to analyze how ecotheological values are represented in English textbooks for Indonesian senior high schools under the Merdeka Curriculum.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach supported by a literature review. The primary data sources are English textbooks for senior high schools published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education under the Merdeka Curriculum. The analysis focuses on identifying textual themes, discourse

patterns, and learning activities that reflect ecotheological values, including:

1. environmental stewardship,
2. ethical responsibility toward nature, and
3. spiritual or moral engagement with environmental issues.

Secondary data consist of previous empirical studies on ecotheology, Islamic education, and English language teaching to contextualize the findings (Rahman et al., 2025; Widya Iswara et al., 2024; Scipio et al., 2025).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of English textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum reveals that environmental topics are unevenly distributed across grade levels, with a noticeable concentration in the eleventh-grade textbook. Environmental issues appear primarily through reading passages, dialogues, and project-based learning activities in this grade, while similar themes are largely absent in the tenth- and twelfth-grade textbooks. This uneven representation highlights a structural limitation in the integration of environmental education within English language learning materials and raises important pedagogical and ideological questions regarding continuity, value formation, and the depth of environmental engagement provided to students.

In the eleventh-grade English textbook, environmental themes are introduced through a variety of textual forms. Reading passages, for example, include informational texts discussing climate change, global warming, and environmental degradation. One such text typically explains the causes and impacts of climate change, emphasizing rising global temperatures, melting polar ice caps, and extreme weather events. These passages are often accompanied by comprehension questions that test students' understanding of factual information, such as identifying main ideas, locating specific details, or summarizing the causes and effects of environmental problems. While these tasks successfully develop students' reading skills and environmental awareness at a basic cognitive level, they remain largely descriptive and informational in nature.

Dialogues in the eleventh-grade textbook also serve as a medium for presenting environmental topics. These dialogues often depict everyday conversations between students, teachers, or community members discussing issues such as recycling, reducing plastic waste, or participating in environmental campaigns. For instance, a

dialogue may show two students discussing a school clean-up program or encouraging each other to bring reusable water bottles instead of single-use plastics. Through such conversational texts, students are introduced to functional language expressions related to giving advice, expressing opinions, or making suggestions, while simultaneously engaging with environmental themes. However, these dialogues generally frame environmental responsibility as a matter of social behavior or personal choice, rather than as a deeply rooted ethical or spiritual commitment.

Project-based learning activities further reinforce environmental topics in the eleventh-grade textbook. Students may be asked to create posters promoting environmental conservation, design campaigns to reduce plastic use, or conduct small-scale research projects on local environmental issues. For example, one project task may instruct students to observe environmental problems in their neighborhood and propose practical solutions, such as organizing waste separation systems or planting trees. These activities align well with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on active learning, creativity, and real-world relevance. They encourage students to apply language skills in meaningful contexts and to engage directly with environmental challenges. Nevertheless, the focus of these projects remains predominantly practical and action-oriented, emphasizing problem-solving and behavioral change without explicitly addressing the underlying moral or spiritual motivations for environmental stewardship.

In contrast to the relatively rich presence of environmental topics in the eleventh-grade textbook, the tenth- and twelfth-grade textbooks show a notable absence of similar content. The tenth-grade textbook tends to focus on general themes such as self-identity, daily activities, interpersonal relationships, and basic social interactions. While these topics are essential for foundational language development, they miss opportunities to introduce environmental awareness at an early stage of secondary education. For instance, descriptive texts about places or people could have incorporated environmental contexts, such as describing natural landscapes, traditional ecological practices, or local environmental challenges. Similarly, procedural texts or recounts could have

included environmentally relevant activities, such as tree planting events or community clean-ups. The absence of such content suggests that environmental education is not systematically embedded from the beginning of students' English learning journey.

The twelfth-grade textbook, which typically prepares students for higher-level academic skills and real-world communication, also lacks substantial environmental content. At this stage, students are cognitively mature and capable of engaging with complex, abstract, and critical issues. Topics such as argumentative writing, opinion essays, and formal presentations could provide an ideal platform for discussing environmental ethics, sustainability debates, and global environmental responsibility. However, the limited inclusion of environmental themes in the twelfth-grade textbook represents a missed opportunity to consolidate and deepen students' environmental literacy before they complete secondary education.

The concentration of environmental topics exclusively in the eleventh-grade textbook indicates a lack of curricular continuity in integrating environmental education across grade levels. Environmental issues are inherently long-term, cumulative, and interconnected; therefore, addressing them in only one grade may limit students' ability to develop sustained environmental awareness and commitment. Continuous exposure to environmental themes across multiple grade levels would allow students to progressively build their knowledge, attitudes, and values, moving from basic awareness to critical reflection and ethical engagement. The fragmented representation observed in the textbooks may hinder this developmental process and result in environmental education being perceived as a peripheral or optional topic rather than a core educational concern.

Beyond the issue of distribution, the way environmental topics are framed in the eleventh-grade textbook also warrants critical attention. The analysis shows that these topics are largely presented from scientific and practical perspectives. Environmental problems are explained using factual information, data, and cause-and-effect relationships, while solutions are framed in terms of procedural steps and recommended behaviors. For example, students are encouraged to reduce waste, save energy, and protect natural resources through specific actions. While such an approach is

undoubtedly valuable and necessary, it reflects a predominantly instrumental view of environmental responsibility.

Ecotheological values, in contrast, are not explicitly articulated in the textbooks. Environmental care is rarely framed as a moral obligation grounded in ethical principles or spiritual beliefs. The relationship between humans and nature is generally portrayed in utilitarian or social terms, emphasizing how environmental protection benefits human well-being, public health, or social harmony. For instance, conserving the environment is often justified by the need to ensure clean air, safe water, and a healthy living environment for people. While these arguments are persuasive and relevant, they tend to center human interests and overlook deeper ethical considerations regarding the intrinsic value of nature.

The implicit treatment of ecotheological values suggests that environmental education in the English textbooks remains largely secular and functional. Nature is presented primarily as a resource to be managed, protected, or sustained for human use, rather than as a creation with inherent worth that demands respect and care. This perspective aligns with dominant scientific and policy-oriented approaches to environmental education but may limit students' emotional and moral engagement with environmental issues. Without explicit ethical or spiritual framing, students may view environmental responsibility as an external requirement or social expectation rather than an internalized value.

Previous studies have highlighted similar tendencies in non-religious subject textbooks, where environmental issues are often addressed without integrating ethical or theological perspectives (Rahman et al., 2025; Prakoso, 2025; Widya Iswara et al., 2024). These studies argue that value-neutral or purely scientific approaches may be insufficient to foster deep and lasting environmental commitment. Ecotheological perspectives, which emphasize the moral responsibility of humans as stewards of the Earth, can complement scientific knowledge by providing a strong ethical foundation for environmental action.

Despite these limitations, the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant pedagogical potential for integrating ecotheological values into English language instruction. The curriculum emphasizes

contextual learning, flexibility, and character education through the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which includes values such as faith, moral integrity, social responsibility, and care for the environment. These principles create a supportive framework for teachers to enrich existing materials with ethical and spiritual dimensions, even when such values are not explicitly stated in the textbooks.

For example, teachers can incorporate reflective writing activities that encourage students to explore their personal values and beliefs related to environmental care. After reading a text about climate change, students could be asked to write reflective essays discussing why protecting the environment matters to them personally, culturally, or spiritually. Such tasks would not only enhance writing skills but also promote introspection and value formation. Teachers could also facilitate critical discussions that invite students to consider ethical questions, such as whether humans have the right to exploit natural resources without limits or what responsibilities individuals and communities have toward future generations.

Project-based learning activities provide another avenue for integrating ecotheological perspectives. Instead of focusing solely on practical solutions, teachers could encourage students to examine the ethical motivations behind environmental action. For instance, a project on waste reduction could include discussions on moral responsibility, gratitude for natural resources, and respect for creation. Students could be asked to connect environmental practices with religious teachings, local wisdom, or cultural values that emphasize harmony between humans and nature.

Such approaches are consistent with Eco-ELT (Ecological English Language Teaching) frameworks, which conceptualize language learning as a means of fostering environmental literacy alongside moral and spiritual awareness (Scipio et al., 2025; Need Analysis Eco-ELT Study, n.d.). Eco-ELT emphasizes the integration of environmental content, critical thinking, and value education within language instruction. By adopting this framework, English teachers can transform language classrooms into spaces where students not only develop linguistic competence but also cultivate ethical sensitivity and ecological consciousness.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that while environmental topics are present in the eleventh-grade English textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum, their distribution across grade levels is uneven, and their framing remains predominantly scientific and practical. The absence of explicit ecotheological values limits the potential of these materials to foster deep moral and spiritual engagement with environmental issues. However, the flexibility and value-oriented orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum provide ample opportunities for teachers to enrich English instruction with ecotheological perspectives. Through reflective writing, critical discussions, and ethically informed project-based learning, environmental education in English classrooms can move beyond instrumental approaches and contribute to the holistic development of environmentally responsible and morally grounded learners.

In addition to issues of distribution and framing, the findings also invite reflection on the role of English as a subject in shaping students' worldview. English, as a global language, carries not only linguistic structures but also ideological meanings, cultural values, and ways of perceiving the world. When environmental topics are introduced in English textbooks, they implicitly position English learning as a medium through which students engage with global challenges such as climate change, sustainability, and ecological crises. However, the absence of consistent environmental themes across grade levels limits the potential of English education to function as a sustained platform for cultivating global ecological awareness.

At the eleventh-grade level, the integration of environmental content aligns with students' increasing exposure to global issues. Texts discussing climate change or sustainable lifestyles often draw on international contexts, such as global warming trends, worldwide environmental movements, or international cooperation in addressing environmental problems. These global perspectives can help students develop a sense of global citizenship and awareness of shared responsibility. Nevertheless, without continuity in earlier and later grades, such global awareness may remain fragmented and disconnected from students' long-term identity formation.

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Environmental consciousness, particularly when linked to moral and ethical values, requires repeated reinforcement over time to become internalized rather than remaining as temporary knowledge.

From a curriculum coherence perspective, the findings suggest that environmental education within the Merdeka Curriculum is not yet fully integrated across subject areas and grade levels. While the curriculum officially emphasizes character education and contextual learning, the implementation in English textbooks appears selective rather than systematic. Ideally, environmental themes should be scaffolded progressively: introduced at a basic descriptive level in the tenth grade, developed through analytical and project-based tasks in the eleventh grade, and critically examined through argumentative and reflective genres in the twelfth grade. Such progression would allow students to move from awareness to engagement and finally to ethical reasoning. The current structure, however, disrupts this progression and risks reducing environmental education to a single thematic unit rather than a sustained educational commitment.

The limited presence of ecotheological values in the textbooks also reflects broader tensions between secular educational frameworks and value-based approaches. In non-religious subjects such as English, ethical and spiritual dimensions are often considered implicit or peripheral, particularly in public education contexts. As a result, environmental responsibility is frequently framed in neutral or technocratic terms, emphasizing efficiency, sustainability, and social benefit. While this approach avoids overt moralization, it may also weaken students' emotional and moral connection to environmental issues. Ecotheology, by contrast, emphasizes the sacredness of creation and the moral duty of humans as caretakers of the Earth. Integrating such perspectives does not necessarily require religious indoctrination but can involve universal ethical principles such as respect, humility, responsibility, and intergenerational justice.

For example, reading passages about deforestation or pollution could be enriched by reflective prompts that ask students to consider ethical questions: Who suffers most from environmental damage? What responsibilities do current generations have toward future ones? How do cultural or religious values shape attitudes toward

nature? These questions encourage students to move beyond surface-level comprehension and engage in moral reasoning. Similarly, dialogues about environmental campaigns could include expressions of moral conviction or personal responsibility, rather than focusing solely on social persuasion or practical advice. By subtly embedding ethical language and reflective tasks, teachers can foster deeper engagement without altering the core content of the textbooks.

The potential role of local wisdom and cultural values also deserves attention. Indonesia has a rich tradition of environmental ethics rooted in local customs, indigenous practices, and religious teachings. Concepts such as harmony with nature, moderation in resource use, and communal responsibility for the environment are deeply embedded in many local cultures. Integrating these values into English instruction can make environmental topics more relatable and meaningful for students. For instance, project-based learning activities could invite students to explore local environmental practices or community-based conservation efforts and present them in English. This approach not only enhances language skills but also reinforces cultural identity and ethical awareness.

Moreover, the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* provides a normative framework that supports the integration of ecotheological values across subjects. Values such as faith in God, noble character, mutual cooperation, and global diversity resonate strongly with ecological ethics. Environmental care can be framed as an expression of gratitude for creation, responsibility toward others, and commitment to justice. English teachers, therefore, are not constrained by the absence of explicit ecotheological content in textbooks; instead, they can interpret curriculum goals creatively and adapt instructional strategies to align language learning with character education.

From an Eco-ELT perspective, the findings underscore the importance of viewing language education as an ecological practice. Eco-ELT advocates argue that language classrooms are not neutral spaces but sites where social, cultural, and ecological values are negotiated. By integrating environmental themes and ethical reflection into language tasks, teachers can help students develop

what has been described as “ecoliteracy,” which includes knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values related to environmental sustainability. The eleventh-grade textbook provides a partial foundation for such ecoliteracy, but its impact is constrained by limited continuity and narrow framing.

The implications of these findings extend beyond textbook analysis to teacher education and professional development. Teachers play a crucial role in mediating textbook content and shaping classroom discourse. Even when textbooks present environmental topics in a purely scientific or practical manner, teachers can expand discussions to include ethical and spiritual dimensions. However, this requires adequate awareness, pedagogical competence, and institutional support. Professional development programs that introduce Eco-ELT principles and ecotheological perspectives could empower teachers to utilize existing materials more effectively and creatively.

Assessment practices also influence how environmental education is perceived by students. When environmental topics are assessed only through factual comprehension or procedural tasks, students may prioritize memorization over reflection. Incorporating assessment formats that value critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and personal reflection can signal the importance of environmental values. For example, reflective essays, opinion pieces, or project presentations can be used to evaluate both language proficiency and depth of understanding. Such assessments align with the Merdeka Curriculum’s emphasis on formative evaluation and holistic learning.

At a policy level, the findings suggest the need for greater alignment between curriculum ideals and textbook implementation. While the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and contextual relevance, textbooks remain a primary resource for teachers and students. Ensuring that environmental education is consistently integrated across grade levels requires deliberate planning and coordination among curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educators. Explicit guidelines on embedding environmental and ethical values in language materials could help address current gaps and promote coherence.

In summary, the extended analysis reinforces the conclusion that environmental topics in English textbooks under the Merdeka

Curriculum are present but unevenly distributed and narrowly framed. The concentration of environmental content in the eleventh-grade textbook, combined with the absence of explicit ecotheological values, limits the potential of English education to foster sustained and value-based environmental awareness. Nevertheless, the curriculum's emphasis on character education, contextual learning, and flexibility provides significant opportunities for teachers to integrate ethical and spiritual perspectives into English instruction. By adopting Eco-ELT approaches, drawing on local wisdom, and utilizing reflective and project-based pedagogies, English classrooms can become meaningful spaces for cultivating ecological consciousness and moral responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that although English textbooks for senior high schools under the Merdeka Curriculum include environmental issues, the integration of ecotheological values remains limited and largely implicit. Environmental content is mainly presented from scientific and practical perspectives, with minimal emphasis on ethical and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, a more intentional integration of ecotheological values in English language teaching is needed to support holistic environmental education and national character-building objectives.

By embedding ecotheological perspectives, English language learning can contribute not only to linguistic competence but also to the development of students' moral, spiritual, and ecological awareness. This approach may further strengthen the relevance of English education within Indonesia's cultural and religious context.

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