Fostering Environmental Sustainability in English Education through Eco-ELT

Jepri Ali Saiful

Department of English Education
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, Indonesia
jeprialisaiful@um-surabaya.ac.id

Abstract

Nature deteriorations like climate change, biodiversity loss, and energy crises, pose threats to the equilibrium of our planetary ecosystem, demanding coordinated efforts across sectors and disciplines. English Language Teaching (ELT) shares the responsibility and potential to address these environmental challenges. However, environmental initiatives in ELT are limited and lack a unified term, concept, and framework to guide practitioners and researchers systematically. This article provides overview of Eco-ELT as a pathway for environmental research and practice in ELT. It delves into the term, concept, key points, and instances of pedagogical practices teaching environmental issues in ELT. Let's collectively address environmental destructions through Eco-ELT. It is never too late for our beloved field of ELT to contribute to the preservation of our planetary ecosystem. To be a part of global Eco-ELT movement, please join our community in Facebook where you could learn and build your networks with English teachers and ELT scholars worldwide. Please click this Facebook link (https://web.facebook.com/groups/291543553251665/).

Keywords: Eco-ELT, environmental sustainability, TESOL, TEFL, TESL

Introduction to Eco-ELT

The concept of Eco-English Language Teaching (Eco-ELT) has emerged as a transformative approach that integrates environmental education into English language teaching, addressing both language development and environmental awareness. As environmental crises, particularly climate change, become more urgent, educators across disciplines are increasingly called to instill a sense of ecological responsibility in students. Eco-ELT, as developed by Dr. Jepri Ali Saiful, represents a pedagogical response to this call, merging the goals of language education with environmental sustainability. This introduction outlines the key features of the Eco-ELT concept, its theoretical framework, and its relevance in the global context of language education.

The foundation of Eco-ELT rests on the belief that English language teaching (ELT) can go beyond linguistic competencies to foster ecological literacy and pro-environmental behaviors among learners (Saiful, 2020). As Saiful (2024a) discusses, Eco-ELT is grounded in the notion that learners' connection with nature can be cultivated through language lessons. By incorporating environmental themes into ELT, students are encouraged to engage with pressing ecological issues, which enhances not only their language skills but also their understanding of and empathy towards the environment. This aligns with broader trends in education that emphasize sustainability and holistic development.

Eco-ELT extends beyond traditional classroom teaching and materials. Saiful (2023) argues that Eco-ELT operates on multiple levels—micro, meso, and macro—enabling it to have a wide-reaching impact. At the micro level, Eco-ELT reshapes classroom practices by integrating environmental topics into lesson plans, assessments, and materials. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate local environmental contexts and issues, fostering learners' awareness of their immediate surroundings. At the meso level, institutions play a pivotal role by providing platforms for environmental initiatives and embedding sustainability into curricula. At the macro level, Eco-ELT contributes to global efforts in addressing environmental challenges through language education, influencing policy and academic discourse on sustainable development. This multi-level framework underscores the adaptability and scalability of Eco-ELT, making it relevant across diverse educational contexts (Saiful, 2024b).

The practical application of Eco-ELT is not confined to theoretical constructs but extends to material development, which plays a crucial role in reinforcing ecological values among learners. Saiful (2014) advocates for the development of Eco-ELT materials that promote environmental

awareness while upholding local wisdom. These materials, tailored to young learners, integrate environmental themes with language activities, making learning more contextual and meaningful. By using examples from local environments, students not only improve their language skills but also learn to appreciate and protect their surroundings. This approach fosters an early connection to environmental responsibility, which is vital in addressing global sustainability goals.

Furthermore, Eco-ELT draws inspiration from ecocriticism, a field that explores the relationship between literature and the environment. Saiful and Setyorini (2022) illustrate how Eco-ELT can be aligned with ecocriticism to deepen learners' understanding of environmental issues through language instruction. By analyzing environmental themes in literary texts, learners develop critical thinking skills and a greater appreciation for the interconnectedness of language, culture, and ecology. This synergy between ecocriticism and Eco-ELT enriches the curriculum and offers a powerful means of promoting sustainability in language education.

In conclusion, Eco-ELT represents an innovative and necessary approach to English language teaching in the context of global environmental challenges. Through its integration of environmental education at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and its emphasis on material development and ecocritical perspectives, Eco-ELT holds the potential to cultivate a generation of language learners who are not only proficient in English but also environmentally conscious global citizens. This pedagogical shift is particularly timely, given the growing recognition of the need for education to play a more active role in addressing the climate crisis.

Key points of Eco-ELT

- Eco-ELT originated in 2014 as a platform for promoting environmental movements within English Language Teaching (ELT), fostering their growth and development (see Saiful, 2014, 2020, & 2023).
- Eco-ELT provides a foundation for integrating environmental education into ELT, simply defined as the study and teaching of environmental issues within the field. When ELT scholars or teachers research or teach environmental topics in English education, they are actively engaging in Eco-ELT.
- ELT instructors hold the dual responsibility of improving students' English skills while fostering sustainable worldviews and behaviors.

- Through Eco-ELT instruction, learners develop language and cognitive skills, social and emotional awareness, and pro-environmental values and behaviors.
- Eco-ELT differs from ecolinguistics and ecocriticism. Ecolinguistics focuses on the role of language in environmental advocacy, while ecocriticism examines how literature contributes to positive human-nature relationships. In contrast, Eco-ELT centers on the role of English education in addressing environmental crises, spanning policy, curriculum, instruction, assessment, teachers, and students. Despite these differences, they can be integrated to tackle environmental issues.
- Eco-ELT holds a similar position within ELT as branches like EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction), CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning), and MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning), forming a distinct area of study and practice.
- Eco-ELT practice follows post-method pedagogy, granting teachers the autonomy to choose methods, strategies, or techniques that best suit their teaching context.
- Eco-ELT research embraces interdisciplinary approaches, allowing ELT researchers to incorporate methods from various fields to study environmental education practices in ELT.

Instances of Eco-ELT Teaching Strategies

The following are several instances of Eco-ELT teaching stratgies.

1. Using music and ecology study called "Ecomusicology" to learn about nature in English lessons (see Saiful, 2024a)

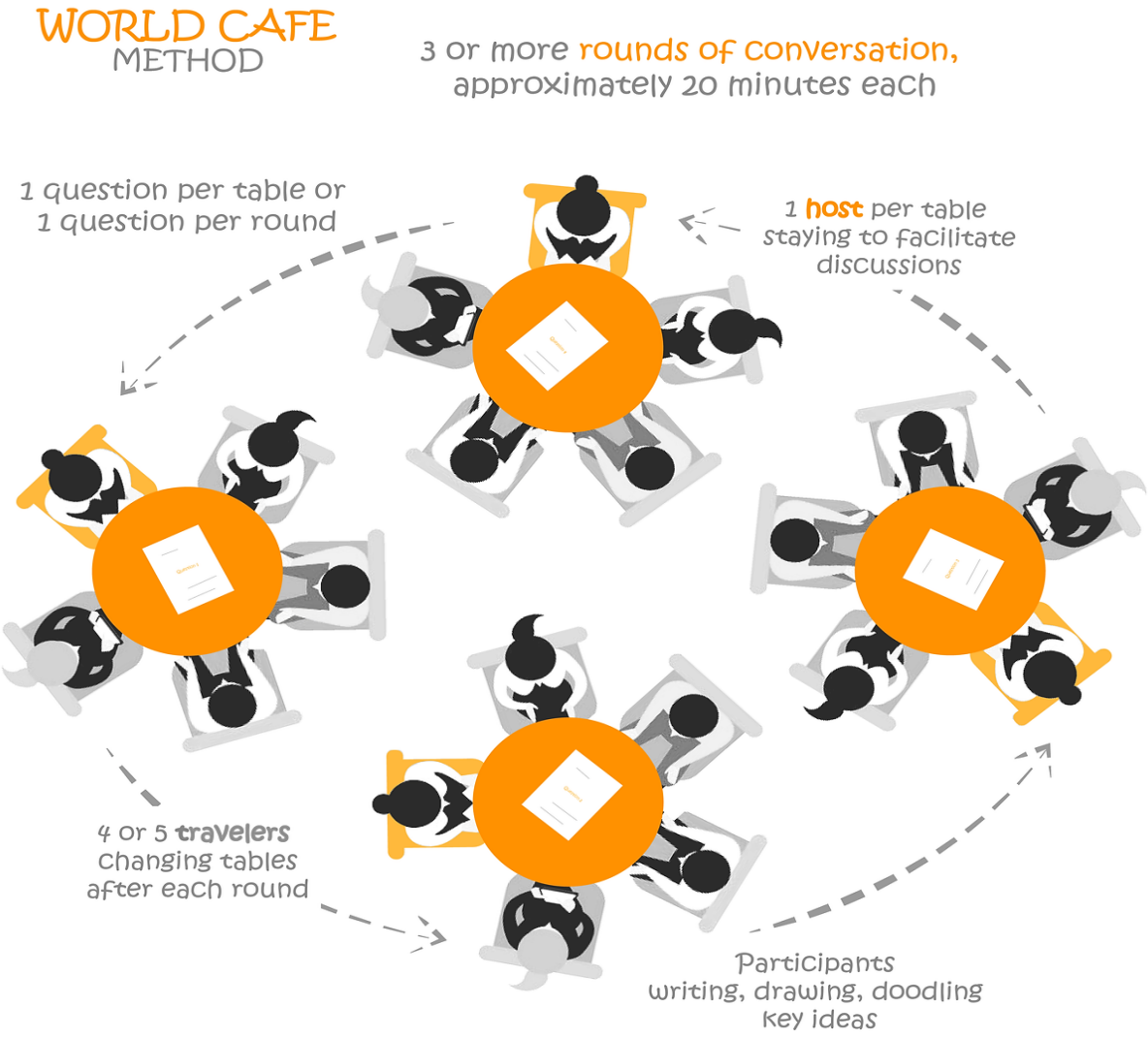
Saiful
Tell : Teaching of English Language and Literature Journal
Vol. 12, No.1, April 2024 Doi: https://doi.org/10.30651/tell.v12i1.21678

Appendix
Ecomusicology Discussion Questions

Musicians	
Artist(s)	(1) Who is/are the singer(s) of the song? (2) What are their personal interests in singing the song?
History	(1) When was the song was released? (2) What was happening at that time in the world/planet?
Music Artefacts	
Content	(1) In your views, what is the song all about? Why the song matter? (2) What can be criticized about the song, its content and display?
Person	(1) Who is addressed in the song? / Whom is the song for? (2) Are there specific names/people mentioned? If yes, who? And why?
Place	(1) Is it a global song or does it refer to specific places? (2) Which places are dealt with?
Other beings	(1) Are there any animals involved in the song? How does the song show the animals? Why so? Are the animals specifically land-based animals? Or are there other animals from ocean or air presented? (2) Is there any representation of plants? How does the song present the plant? Why so? Are the plants from land-based or from the ocean too? (3) How are the presentation of nature in general in the song?
Music in Actions (Music Analysis)	
Instruments	(1) Which music instruments are used or can be heard? (In different part of the song)
Singer	(1) Who sings the song? (e.g., female/male/group/duo/solo? (2) Why does this composition of singer matter for the song?
Feelings	(1) How does the song feel to you? (2) How does the song feel to the listeners/publics? (See the YouTube online comments)
Music in Actions (Environment)	
Reception	How can the song be listened to? And which opportunities does the artist provide to encourage sustainable music reception?

2. We can also teach environmental topics using task-based language learning instructions (Hauschild et al., 2012; Nkwetisama, 2011), ecocomposition (Elsherif, 2013) or environmental essay writing (Setyowati et al., 2022), and digital storytelling (Putri, 2018).

3. Ecocritical discussion on environmental problems using World Café Method (https://www.annmurraybrown.com/single-post/facilitation-tool-under-the-spotlight-world-café-method)



4. Poster Presentation on environmental problems

Using poster presentations to teach environmental problems in English lessons is an engaging and interactive approach. Teachers can assign students environmental topics, such as climate change, pollution, or deforestation, and have them create posters that visually represent the issue, its causes, and potential solutions. Through this process, students practice research skills, critical thinking, and English language proficiency as they gather information, synthesize key points, and write clear, concise explanations. The presentation phase encourages students to verbally articulate their findings in English, enhancing speaking and listening skills while promoting class discussions. This method not only improves language abilities but also fosters environmental awareness, encouraging students to think critically about real-world issues. Furthermore, integrating visuals and creative design into the lesson makes the learning experience more memorable and impactful.

5. Drama on climate change or other environmental topics

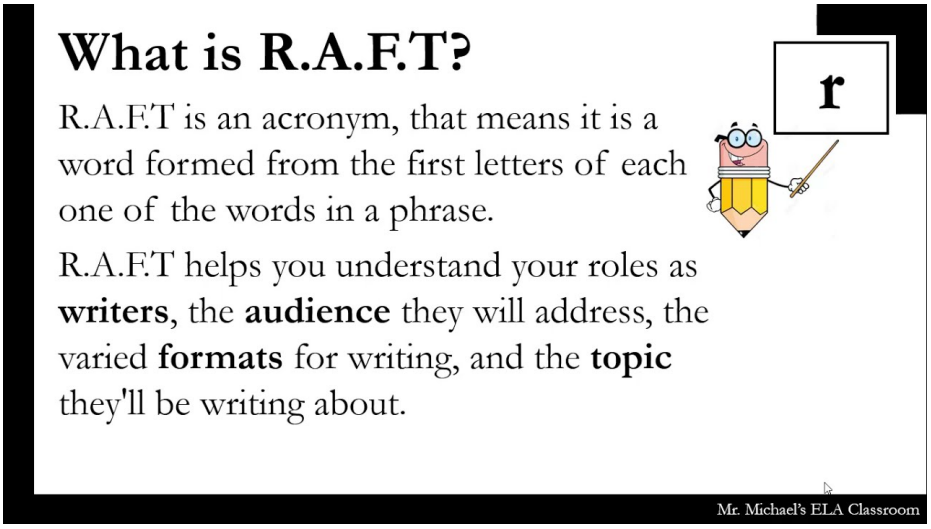
Drama could be an effective way to engage students in both language learning and environmental awareness. Teachers can guide students in creating short plays or skits that portray the effects of climate change, deforestation, or pollution. Through role-play, students can explore various perspectives, such as those of affected communities, scientists, or policymakers. This method encourages collaboration, enhances speaking, listening, and writing skills, and builds confidence in using English in meaningful contexts. As students perform their dramas, they actively communicate complex environmental concepts while practicing vocabulary and grammar related to environmental issues. Drama also promotes empathy and critical thinking, allowing students to internalize the gravity of global environmental challenges while brainstorming possible solutions. By integrating drama into English lessons, educators create an immersive, creative, and memorable learning experience that fosters both language development and environmental responsibility.

6. Infographics on environmental problems

Infographics are a powerful tool for teaching environmental problems in English lessons because they combine visual elements with concise text, making complex information easier to understand and retain. To use infographics effectively, teachers can assign students the task of

creating their own infographics about specific environmental issues, such as climate change, deforestation, or pollution. This activity involves researching the topic, selecting key information, and presenting it in a visually appealing way, all while practicing English language skills such as reading, writing, and summarizing. As students design their infographics, they engage with vocabulary and phrases related to environmental issues, reinforcing language acquisition through context. Presenting their completed infographics in class encourages speaking and discussion, fostering collaborative learning and deeper understanding of environmental challenges. This method not only improves language skills but also empowers students to communicate critical global issues effectively.

7. RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic)
   https://www.pinterest.com/pin/260857003387205192/



The RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) framework is an engaging strategy to teach environmental issues in English lessons, allowing students to explore these topics creatively while developing language skills. In this model, students assume a specific *Role* (e.g., environmental activist, concerned citizen, or wildlife species), address a particular *Audience* (e.g., government officials, the general public, or school peers), choose a *Format* (e.g., letter, speech, blog post), and focus on an environmental *Topic* (e.g., climate change, deforestation, or pollution). For example, students might take on the role of a marine animal writing a letter to the public about the effects

of ocean pollution. This approach encourages them to research the topic, learn relevant vocabulary, and structure their writing in a meaningful way. The RAFT model enhances critical thinking by pushing students to consider different perspectives and communicate their ideas in various formats, fostering creativity and deeper engagement with both the language and the environmental issues at hand.

Conclusion

Eco-ELT serves as a foundation for integrating environmental education into English language teaching, defined as the study and teaching of environmental issues within ELT. When ELT scholars or teachers focus on environmental topics, they are engaging in Eco-ELT practices. Following a post-method pedagogy, Eco-ELT allows teachers the flexibility to choose methods, strategies, and techniques that best fit their teaching context. These strategies include: (1) ecomusicology, (2) task-based language learning, (3) ecocomposition, (4) environmental essay writing, (5) digital storytelling, (6) ecocritical discussions, (7) poster presentations, (8) drama, (9) infographics, and (10) the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) framework.

References

Elsherif, E. A. (2013). Raising awareness: introducing ecocomposition into EFL writing classroom. *Arab World English Journal*, *4*(1), 77–89. https://awej.org/raising-awareness-introducing-ecocomposition-into-efl- writing-classroom/

Hauschild, S., Poltavtchenko, E., & Stoller, F. L. (2012). Going green: merging environmental education and language instruction. *English Teaching Forum*, *50*(2), 2–13. https://www.turcomat.org/index.php/turkbilmat/article/view/5472

Nkwetisama, C. M. (2011). EFL/ESL and environmental education: towards an eco-applied linguistic awareness in Cameroon. *World Journal of Education*, *1*(1), 110-118. https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v1n1p110

Putri, G. A. P. E. I. (2018). Critical environmental education in tertiary English language teaching (ELT): a collaborative digital storytelling project. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *8*(2), 336–344. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i2.13280

Saiful, J. A. (2024a). Chirping Symphony of Nature in the Digital Art World: How Ecomusicology Cultivates EFL Students' Nature Connectedness and Interests. *TELL: Teaching of English Language and Literature, 2024, 2*(1), 1-17. https://rb.gy/22w93c

Saiful, J. A. (2024b). Sowing seeds of change: Eco-ELT integration for environmental sustainability across micro, meso, and macro levels in TESOL department. *The Newsletter of the Higher Education Interest Section, TESOL International Association*. Link: http://surl.li/sxtjt

Saiful, J. A. (2023). Eco-ELT for environmental research and praxis in ELT. *Journal of English as a Foreign Language, 13*(2). https://e-journal.iain-palangkaraya.ac.id/index.php/jefl/article/view/6335

Saiful, J. A., & Setyorini, A. (2022). Ecocriticism course: Development of English pre-service teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Sustainability. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 24(2). https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2022-0013

Saiful, J. A. (2020). New innovation in English language teaching: Revealing concepts and applications of ECO-ELT. *Tell: Teaching of English Language and Literature Journal, 8*(1), 62-72. http://dx.doi.org/10.30651/tell.v8i1.4604

Saiful, J. A. (2014). Eco-ELT materials development: The proposed idea towards instilling the concept of loving the environment and upholding the virtues of local wisdom to young

learners. *Proceedings of the 3rd UAD TEFL International Conference 2014: Materials Development in Asia and Beyond: Directions, Issues, and Challenges* (pp. 580-592). English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. Link: http://surl.li/sxtii

Setyowati, L., Prayogo, K. J. D., Gane, B. A., & Putri, S. S. (2022b). Using environmental issues for essay writing class: the students' views and challenges. *KnE Social Sciences,* 7(7), 23–36. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i7.10646