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## Teaching Critically and Creatively: Fusing Environmental Education for Social and Language Development in English Language Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

In the dynamic landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT), the widespread reliance on commercially-produced textbooks has spurred a critical examination of their relevance to the diverse needs and interests of learners in global contexts. Typically originating from English-speaking countries, these textbooks predominantly feature neutral and non-controversial topics such as food, shopping, ceremonies, and travel, which may not align with the varied experiences of learners. This article, using a descriptive analytical approach, contends that the malleability of English language textbooks provides an opportunity for the application of Critical Pedagogy (CP), which can turn the classroom into a place where learners stop thinking about such topics. In such a situation, by integrating 'Environmental Education' (EE) - as a transformative process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving, and take action to improve the environment - it is believed that learners can develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills along with enhancing language proficiency. Showing the possibility of implementing the proposed framework, a sample lesson about 'water crisis' is provided and elaborated on. To highlight the broader educational backdrop, it is argued that this shift not only broadens the limited scope of language learning but also, by establishing clear personal relevance for learners in both their present and future lives, it can foster a critical and creative environment within English language teaching programs, contributing to the development of sustainable futures for the learners.

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## 1. Introduction

In contemporary discourse, English has become so pervasive on a global scale that designating it as a global language, international language, world language, or lingua franca (cf. Crystal, 1997; McKay, 2002; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Jenkins, 2007) is scarcely met with astonishment. However, whether viewed as a positive or negative development, the escalating prevalence of English in our time has elicited diverse reactions and prompted numerous inquiries among practitioners in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT). As a result of the current state of English instruction and learning, numerous challenging questions have emerged, surpassing mere pedagogical concerns. Essentially, the unique global position of English has far-reaching effects on how it is perceived, defined, presented, learned, and taught. This has led to extensive discussions encompassing ideological, cultural, social, and political dimensions (Matsuda, 2018).

Initially, the expansion of English, notably through ELT, was viewed favorably as a beneficial development or instrumental advantage from English-speaking nations to non-English-speaking countries, as highlighted by Ghafar Samar and Davari (2011). However, this propagation also stirred sensitivity, criticism, and resistance, leading to the emergence of theoretical objections and critical perspectives towards ELT. Consequently, the infusion of critical theories into education, as noted by Giroux (2020), has facilitated the promotion of critical thinking and the establishment of critical pedagogy (CP).

An examination of this critical trend reveals that CP, characterized by its approach to language teaching that connects the classroom context to the broader social context, aiming for social transformation through education (Akbari, 2008), has not only gained significant importance and become a valuable educational goal, but has also acquired notable prominence in the field of ELT (Davari & Iranmehr, 2019).

Recognizing the increasing importance of CP in the realm of language education, this article aims to present an innovative and evaluative proposal. The author seeks to incorporate 'Environmental Education' (EE) as a central theme in the ELT program, aligning with the pivotal subjects within the field (Sampedro & Hillyard, 2004). The underlying belief is that the infusion of this thematic element into English classrooms can foster critical thinking and optimize students' creative capacities. Additionally, adopting such an approach may help mitigate sensitivities associated with the teaching of English, often perceived as a language with imperialistic connotations in various global societies (see Phillipson, 1992).

Critical Pedagogy is an approach attempting to humanize and empower learners. As Holmes and Corbett (2023) write, it is mostly associated with the Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire (1970), who used the principles of critical theory of the Frankfurt school as its main source. Far from being only a method, critical pedagogy is rather a way of approaching the world from a social

perspective, in which emphasis is placed on the teacher–learner interactions as a means of enabling students to become active participants in their social reality through critical reflection (McLaren, 2003). Despite its presence in various fields of education, according to Canagarajah (2005), the concept of critical pedagogy in the ELT profession dates back to the 1980s. But, as Akbari (2008) points out, it has only been relatively recently that we have seen heightened interest in its principles and practical implications. In his words, most of the discussion on CP has been limited to its rationale and not much has been done to bring it down to the actual world of classroom practice, for which it was originally intended. In this regard, Akbari (*ibid*) writes:

Unlike most of the other concepts and ideas one encounters in the literature on L2 teaching, CP is not a theory, but a way of “doing” learning and teaching (Canagarajah, 2005: 932), or borrowing Pennycook’s (2001) terminology, it is teaching with an attitude. What critical pedagogues are after is the transformation of society through education, including language teaching. In this vein, according to Norton and Toohey (2004), language is not just as a means for communication, rather it is “a practice that constructs, and is constructed by the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future” (p.1). Considering the complex sociohistorical and political aspects of language teaching and learning, as Sadeghi (2008) writes, many researchers suggest that critical pedagogy should be the vital essence of teaching. Considering materials as the core resources in language-learning programs, Rashidi and Safari (2011) offer some principles that six of them are as follows:

- a) ELT materials should develop learners’ communicative abilities while applying these abilities to raise learners’ critical consciousness of the world around them and the ability to act on it.
- b) If the materials have a joint goal, then ELT materials for critical pedagogy are expected to have two major outcomes: social development and language skill development on the part of the learner.
- c) The topics and themes included in ELT materials should be generative to invoke considerable discussion and analysis.
- d) The source of the themes of the materials should be derived from the learners’ life situations, needs, and interests.
- e) ELT materials should take into account the learner’s role as a decision-maker and subject of the act.
- f) In terms of evaluative activities, it was expected that students develop their critical consciousness in line with their language mastery.

In addition, Akbari (2008) attempts to highlight the applications of CP for L2 classrooms and provides hints as to how L2 teaching can result in the improvement of the lives of those who are normally not considered in ELT discussions. In his terms, learners’ needs in CP are defined not just linguistically or in terms of tasks, but in terms of the purposes they serve in the social mobility and

activism of students (p. 280). In this regard, Sadeghi (2008) points out that it is possible to identify three main approaches to critical pedagogy. One approach is to take local situations seriously and negotiate with students about teaching/learning. Another approach is to address the issues of power, discourse, and knowledge. The last approach is to connect the content, students' lives, and the larger context of students' lives through engaged dialogues.

## 2. A brief note on previous works

Akbari (2008) contends that commercially produced coursebooks, widely regarded as the cornerstone of instruction in numerous mainstream language teaching environments, often fall short in addressing essential sensitivities. According to him, these materials lack the necessary nuance to effectively navigate and respond to the diverse cultural and contextual concerns that learners may bring to the language learning experience. Expanding on this perspective, Gray (2000) delves into the intricacies of the global coursebook phenomenon. This category encompasses English language textbooks crafted in English-speaking countries, intended as primary instructional resources in language classrooms across the globe. Gray critically examines the inherent challenges associated with global coursebooks, shedding light on their potential limitations in capturing the rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural diversity. Gray's scrutiny extends to the identification of specific topics that coursebook writers are commonly counseled to avoid. His exploration highlights the intricate balance that authors must strike in crafting materials suitable for a global audience while being cautious not to perpetuate stereotypes or inadvertently overlook the sensitivities inherent in various cultural and linguistic contexts. By problematizing the global coursebook, Gray invites reflection on the need for more nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches to language instruction that can better accommodate the complexities of diverse learner backgrounds. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, as noted by Pohl and Szesztay (2020), ELT extends beyond the mere mastery of language skills, encompassing broader educational objectives. Despite this acknowledgment, it is observed that the majority of coursebooks predominantly focus on seemingly innocuous subjects such as food, shopping, or travel, as highlighted by scholars like Akbari (2008) and Gray (2002). Strikingly, these materials often steer clear of engaging with pertinent social and global issues that surround us. This tendency to address language instruction through a lens of neutrality and detached topics raises questions about the extent to which ELT materials genuinely reflect the diverse and complex realities of the world, hindering the potential for learners to critically engage with broader societal and global contexts.

Environmental education refers to a process of learning that aims to increase knowledge and awareness about the environment, foster positive attitudes towards nature, and promote responsible behavior and sustainable practices. The goal of environmental education is to empower individuals and communities to become informed, engaged, and active stewards of the environment. Environmental education imparts knowledge that affects all living organisms on our planet. It creates

knowledge, develops attitudes, and changes behavior to bring about social change that promotes responsible stewardship of the environment (Fraser et al., 2015). Gürsoy (2010) argues that "environmental education is to help people develop positive attitudes to protect the environment and the natural sources and gain sustainable changes in their behavior as a result of these attitudes and finally guide them to become actively involved in the solutions of environmental problems" (p. 233). According to Nkwetisama (2011), environmental education "can be considered as concerted efforts conscientiously organized to teach or draw the attention of human beings about how natural environments function and how these human beings can manage and protect them" (p. 111).

Environmental education enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective decision-making skills, and teaches individuals to weigh various sides of an environmental issue to make informed and responsible decisions. Environmental education does not advocate a particular viewpoint or course of action. The components or the goals of environmental education, as Fang, Hassan, and Lepage (2023) write, are:

- Awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges
- Knowledge and understanding of the environment and environmental challenges
- Attitudes of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality
- Skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges
- Participation in activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges

In short, environmental education can be defined as a process of learning that aims to increase awareness and understanding of the environment, its issues, and the interdependence between humans and the natural world. Its primary goal is to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that empower individuals and communities to actively participate in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainability.

### **3. Research methodology**

This research employs a rigorous descriptive and analytic approach to explore the rationale behind integrating environmental education into English language teaching. It initiates with an in-depth literature review, synthesizing existing research to establish theoretical foundations and pedagogical frameworks supporting the fusion of environmental concepts with language instruction. A content analysis of English language teaching materials is conducted to discern the current representation of environmental content. This methodological framework is deliberately confined to qualitative data extracted from scholarly literature, allowing for an in-depth analysis of theoretical perspectives and pedagogical insights related to the integration. Through this approach, the article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical implications, shedding light on the potential benefits for language development and socio-environmental awareness within the context of English language teaching.

#### 4. Discussion

The exploration of integrating environmental education into English language teaching delves into the reasons behind it ("Why") and provides insights into the practical approaches and methodologies involved ("How").

In recent years, particularly since the latter half of the 1980s, significant attention has been directed toward the inclusion of global issues in English studies, as highlighted by Rascón-Moreno (2013). The integration of global issues as a thematic focus in English Language Teaching course books has been emphasized in related literature. Matsuda (2006) asserts that, given the contemporary aspiration of learners to become proficient users of English on the international stage, there is a growing need to cultivate awareness of global cultures and issues. She suggests that topics such as environmental conservation offer suitable content for readings, class discussions, and course assignments.

Driven by critical pedagogy's emphasis on linking society and school, language educators increasingly seek to merge educational goals with social and global responsibilities (Gürsoy & Saglam, 2011). Global issues, including environmental education emerge as a prime candidate for achieving this, neatly marrying language learning with social awareness (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2014). As Rascón-Moreno (2013) highlights, addressing such content in the English classroom allows simultaneous content transmission and language acquisition, making it a pedagogically advantageous choice.

Regarding the rationale for integrating environmental education as one of the main themes of global issues in ELT, it is believed that the primary aim of language teaching is to communicate with people from other societies and cultures. Thus, through this perspective, language is viewed as a natural vehicle for fostering cross-cultural understanding and for raising awareness on global and social issues (Sampedro & Hillyard, 2004). But, looking at various language programs in many countries and contexts reveals that, as Read (2017) writes, a standardized approach to schooling, including ELT, is increasingly the norm. This is typically characterized by low-risk, discrete item teaching, frequent testing, and dependence on measurable results and outcomes. In his words, by introducing children to such issues as part of foreign language lessons, we can redress this balance and integrate a more holistic, personalized approach to children's education into our classroom practice. Regarding the rationale for introducing this theme into ELT programs, Read (2017: 11) mentions these benefits:

- raising awareness of global issues that touch children's lives, no matter where they live.
  - empowering children with language to talk about such issues confidently.
  - developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills through enquiry-based discussion.
- developing social skills such as listening, turn-taking, sharing ideas, and co-operating with others to

carry out activities.

- fostering positive attitudes such as tolerance and respect for the views of others.
- encouraging the belief that it is the responsibility of everyone to meet the Global Goals and that by working together this is more likely to be achievable.
- providing opportunities for children to think 'out of the box' and come up with their creative ideas, designs, products, and solutions.
- integrating values which help to promote reflective thinking, responsible choices, and principled behavior.

Reviewing the growing literature on the topic reveals that integrating environmental education into English language teaching is not just a trendy add-on, but a crucial step towards preparing responsible global citizens equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century. Here's why:

#### **4.1. Raising Awareness**

Climate change, pollution, deforestation - they threaten us all. ELT classrooms can become platforms to discuss these interconnected challenges, fostering critical thinking and understanding their local and global ripples (cf. Afrin & Saha, 2023; Curdt-Christiansen, 2021). In ELT classrooms, as Nanni and Allan (2020) point out, the exploration of such issues seamlessly intertwines with discussions on their local impacts, fostering a dynamic learning environment that cultivates both global awareness and community engagement. Imagine debates on energy sources, local action projects, and virtual nature trips - all sparking environmental awareness and citizen action. By empowering students with knowledge, skills, and motivation, we equip them to tackle these threats and build a greener future, one classroom, one action at a time.

Additionally, exploring environmental topics in the ELT curriculum (Al-Jarf, 2022) extends beyond conveying facts and figures; it serves as a gateway for students to forge a profound emotional connection with the planet, rooted in empathy and concern. This connection plays a crucial role in instilling a sense of responsibility and catalyzing positive action towards environmental conservation. As students delve into environmental issues, they move beyond mere knowledge acquisition to cultivate a deep-seated awareness of the interconnectedness between human activities and the well-being of the planet. This heightened awareness transcends traditional educational boundaries, encouraging a holistic understanding of the ecological challenges facing the world today.

#### **4.2. Developing Language Skills**

While raising awareness is crucial, environmental education in ELT offers immense benefits for developing students' language skills across the board (cf. Al-Jarf, 2022). Environmental themes offer a rich source of engaging and relevant content that motivates students to communicate effectively (Nugraha & Ridwan, 2019). Discussing environmental documentaries, analyzing news articles, or writing persuasive letters to policymakers all provide opportunities to practice various language

skills.

Imagine a classroom buzzing with lively discussions about renewable energy sources, persuasive presentations on reducing plastic waste, and creative writing projects about preserving endangered species. This isn't just an environmental science class; it's a language laboratory where engaging content fuels effective communication.

Environmental education in ELT provides a platform for practicing and honing various language skills in meaningful contexts (Omidvar & Sukumar, 2013). Students engage in:

- Reading: Analyzing news articles, research papers, and environmental literature exposes them to different writing styles and strengthens their critical reading skills.
- Writing: Creating eco-friendly poems, persuasive essays, or informative reports allows them to practice various written forms and refine their writing skills.
- Speaking: Participating in debates, presentations, and group discussions about environmental issues develops their spoken English fluency and confidence.
- Listening: Actively listening to documentaries, expert talks, and peer presentations enhances their listening comprehension skills and ability to grasp complex information.

By delving into environmental themes, students don't just learn English; they learn to use it as a powerful tool for communication, collaboration, and positive change.

### 4.3. Sharpening Critical Thinking

Beyond raising awareness and fostering language skills, environmental education offers a unique opportunity to nurture critical thinking skills in students (Purwanto et al, 2022). Environmental education pushes students beyond simply memorizing facts and figures. It encourages them to engage in critical inquiry, questioning, and analyzing information from diverse sources like scientific data, media reports, and personal opinions. They learn to differentiate reliable information from bias, identify hidden assumptions, and evaluate the validity of arguments. Environmental education equips students with the tools to critically analyze messages they encounter daily (Triyono, Sahayu, & Fath, 2023).. Imagine an ELT classroom bustling with debates about the ethics of genetically modified crops, critical analyses of biased health-related articles, and collaborative brainstorming sessions for reducing energy consumption. This isn't just an environmental studies class; it's a critical thinking boot camp where students sharpen their minds to tackle complex challenges.

In addition, environmental challenges demand creative solutions. By delving into real-world issues like water scarcity, air pollution, and biodiversity loss, ELT classrooms become fertile ground for collaborative problem-solving. Students learn to:

- Identify root causes: Go beyond surface symptoms and analyze the complex factors contributing to environmental problems.
- Brainstorm innovative solutions: Think outside the box and propose creative ideas for mitigating



environmental challenges.

- Evaluate consequences: Analyze the potential impact of proposed solutions and consider unintended consequences.
- Collaborate effectively: Work in teams, respect diverse perspectives, and communicate effectively to reach consensus.

This problem-solving skill set empowers students to become proactive agents of change in their communities and beyond.

#### **4.4. Fostering Global Citizenship**

Beyond raising awareness, enriching language skills, and sharpening critical thinking, environmental education in ELT plays a crucial role in fostering global citizenship (Kolleck & Yemini, 2020). Imagine an ELT classroom where students explore the interconnectedness of global environmental challenges, analyze diverse cultural perspectives on sustainability, and collaborate on projects that benefit communities worldwide. This isn't just an environmentalism club; it's a global citizenship incubator where students develop the values and skills to create a more just and sustainable planet for all.

Here we should remember that environmental issues have no borders. Pollution crosses oceans, climate change affects diverse communities, and the quest for sustainability demands global collaboration. Based on the growing literature on the topic, including Perren & Wurr (2015), Porto, Houghton, & Byram (2018), Wu (2020), Lütge, Merse, & Rauschert (2023).

Environmental education in ELT fosters intercultural understanding by:

- Exploring diverse perspectives: Examining how different cultures and communities perceive and respond to environmental challenges encourages empathy and respect for varied approaches.
- Learning from each other: Sharing traditional knowledge, local solutions, and cultural practices related to environmental stewardship inspires collaborative learning and promotes cross-cultural exchange.
- Understanding interconnectedness: Recognizing the global impact of local actions and the interdependency of nations in addressing environmental challenges strengthens the sense of shared responsibility.
- This broadened perspective empowers students to become responsible global citizens who value collaboration and work towards solutions that benefit the entire planet.
- Additionally, global citizenship encompasses not just understanding, but taking action.

Environmental education in ELT fosters active engagement by:

- Connecting classroom learning to real-world action: Encouraging students to participate in local environmental initiatives, such as community cleanups, sustainable living campaigns, or advocacy projects, bridges the gap between theory and practice.

- Building collaborative networks: Connecting students with environmental organizations, social justice groups, and youth networks expands their opportunities to contribute to global change efforts.
- Empowering changemakers: Recognizing and validating students' agency as catalysts for positive change motivates them to continue advocating for environmental solutions throughout their lives.

This focus on action transforms students from passive learners into proactive global citizens who actively contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future.

### **Environmental Education in ELT: How?**

Integrating Environmental Education in ELT involves weaving ecological principles into language lessons, fostering a connection between language learning and environmental awareness. Here are several strategies with descriptions on how to achieve this integration:

#### **a) Incorporate Environmental Themes in Reading Materials**

Select reading materials, such as articles, stories, or news related to environmental issues that align with language proficiency levels. Encourage students to read, comprehend, and discuss the content, promoting language skills while raising environmental awareness.

Delving into the world of environmental themes through reading materials can be a captivating journey for ELT students. Instead of textbooks, imagine classrooms buzzing with engaging articles, captivating stories, and real-world news snippets, all carefully chosen to match students' language levels. These carefully curated texts become springboards for exploration, where vocabulary takes flight amidst discussions of deforestation, oceans overflowing with plastic, and communities fighting for clean water. As students grapple with the complexities of these issues, they not only hone their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills but also cultivate a deep-seated awareness of the environmental challenges facing our planet. This dynamic interplay between language learning and environmental understanding is the beating heart of this approach, where every sentence parsed and every argument analyzed becomes a step towards a more sustainable future. So, let's ditch the dry grammar drills and open the doors to captivating narratives, for within their pages lie the seeds of both linguistic mastery and ecological consciousness.

#### **b) Environmental Vocabulary Building**

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary related to environmental topics. Create word banks or glossaries that include terms like sustainability, biodiversity, conservation, and climate change. Encourage students to use this vocabulary in discussions, writing assignments, and presentations (cf. Sudipa, 2020; Kautz, 2016)

Incorporating an intentional focus on environmental vocabulary within educational settings not only enhances students' language proficiency but also cultivates a deeper understanding of crucial

ecological concepts. By introducing and reinforcing such key terms educators can lay the foundation for a more environmentally conscious and informed generation. Establishing word banks or glossaries dedicated to these topics provides students with readily available resources, empowering them to articulate their thoughts and engage in meaningful discussions. Moreover, encouraging the application of this specialized vocabulary in various contexts, including class discussions, written assignments, and presentations, not only reinforces its usage but also fosters a sense of environmental responsibility and awareness among students.

#### **c) Use Real-Life Environmental Contexts for Language Practice**

Design language exercises and role-playing scenarios based on real-life environmental contexts. For instance, simulate a debate on renewable energy policies, or have students engage in a mock negotiation about environmental conservation measures, providing practical language practice in authentic situations.

To make learning about the environment more interesting, teachers can create fun activities that use real-life situations (Baturay et al, 2022). For example, they can set up a debate where students discuss renewable energy policies or have a pretend negotiation about how to protect the environment. This way, students get to practice practically using environmental words. These activities help students understand environmental issues better and learn how to talk about them effectively. It's like learning by doing, and it makes studying the environment more exciting and useful.

#### **d) Utilize Multimedia Resources**

Incorporate environmental documentaries, podcasts, and news clips into lessons. This not only exposes students to diverse accents and speaking styles but also allows them to engage with current environmental issues, fostering listening and speaking skills (Chang et al, 2011).

Bring the environment into the classroom by including documentaries, podcasts, and news clips in your lessons. This not only lets students hear different ways people talk but also helps them stay updated on what's happening with the environment right now. It's a cool way to practice listening and speaking skills while learning about important issues (Fauville et al, 2014). Whether it's a documentary on nature, a podcast discussing climate change, or a news clip about conservation efforts, these real-world materials make learning more interesting and connect classroom lessons to what's happening in the world. It's like having a conversation about the environment with the whole world!

#### **e) Environmental Writing Assignments**

Assign writing tasks that prompt students to express their opinions on environmental topics, such as composing persuasive letters to local authorities, writing blog posts on sustainable living, or crafting research papers on environmental challenges (Setyowati & Widiati, 2014; Pascual Velasco, 2018).

Encourage students to share their thoughts and ideas about the environment through writing tasks that spark their creativity and critical thinking (Iswandari, Prayago, and Cahyono, 2017). Assignments like crafting persuasive letters to local authorities, writing blog posts on sustainable living, or researching and composing papers on environmental challenges not only develop their writing skills but also empower them to voice their opinions on important topics. By channeling their thoughts into persuasive letters, students learn how to advocate for change in their community. Creating blog posts on sustainable living allows them to explore personal perspectives and share insights with a broader audience. Research papers on environmental challenges deepen their understanding of complex issues and strengthen their ability to communicate effectively. These writing tasks not only enhance language proficiency but also instill a sense of responsibility and engagement with environmental concerns, fostering a generation of informed and articulate advocates for a sustainable future.

#### **f) Project-Based Learning**

Implement project-based learning activities that require students to collaborate on environmentally focused projects (Genc, 2015; Bramwell-Lalor et al, 2020; López & Palacios, 2024). This could involve creating awareness campaigns, designing eco-friendly initiatives, or developing proposals for sustainable practices within the school or community.

Take learning beyond the classroom by incorporating project-based activities that encourage students to collaborate on environmentally focused projects. Engage them in creating awareness campaigns, designing eco-friendly initiatives, or developing proposals for sustainable practices within the school or community. By working together on these projects, students not only apply their knowledge of environmental concepts but also develop teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills (Vidosavljević, M., & Vidosavljević, 2018). These hands-on activities provide a tangible connection to real-world issues, fostering a sense of responsibility and a passion for making a positive impact. As students actively participate in creating solutions for environmental challenges, they not only deepen their understanding of sustainability but also gain valuable practical experience that goes beyond traditional classroom learning. Through project-based learning, students become active contributors to building a greener and more sustainable future (Nanni & Allan, 2020)

#### **g) Field Trips and Outdoor Learning**

Organize field trips or outdoor activities that immerse students in nature, providing a hands-on experience. This could involve visits to botanical gardens, wildlife reserves, or community gardens, complemented by language activities like journaling or group discussions.

Make learning about nature an adventure by organizing field trips or outdoor activities that let students explore the environment up close. Take them to places like botanical gardens, wildlife reserves, or community gardens or even parks where they can experience nature hands-on (Jose, Patrick, & Moseley, 2017; Morag & Tal, 2012). (During these trips, encourage language activities

like journaling or group discussions to help them express their thoughts about what they see and learn. This way, students not only get to enjoy being outdoors but also practice using language in a real-life context (Moteea, 2022). It's like turning nature into a classroom where they can touch, see, and talk about the amazing things around them.

#### **h) Reflective Practices**

Incorporate reflective practices, such as journaling or class discussions, to encourage students to contemplate their ecological footprint, explore their values regarding environmental responsibility, and articulate their thoughts in the target language (Fien & Rawling, 1996; Tooth & Penschaw, 2009).

Have students think about how they affect the environment by using simple activities like writing in a journal or talking in class. Ask them about their choices and what they think about taking care of nature. This way, they not only learn about the environment but also practice talking about it in the language they're learning. It's like turning their thoughts into words, making the connection between what they do and how it helps the planet.

Based on the above suggestions, a sample lesson about "Water Crisis" as an instance of global issues has been developed by the author. The justification for the important components of the sample lesson, including the rationale, knowledge aim, creativity focus, and language focus, has been provided, and the function of each task has been explained (see Appendix 1).

### **5. Conclusion**

As it was pointed out, English, as the preeminent global language, is taught and learned by millions worldwide. However, in many contexts, English language teaching has become heavily reliant on commercially produced textbooks that often lack cultural relevance or engagement with pressing social issues. This overdependence on decontextualized materials represents a lost opportunity to utilize English classrooms for fostering critical thinking and empowering learners to address real-world challenges. The integration of environmental education offers a promising pedagogical approach to bridge this gap. By infusing lessons with themes of ecological sustainability, learners can simultaneously build English proficiency while cultivating environmental awareness and problem-solving skills.

Considering this fact, this article proposed a framework for harnessing the flexibility of English language curricula to incorporate environmental education through the lens of critical pedagogy. A sample lesson illustrates the potential of this approach to equip learners with linguistic and analytical competencies to understand complex sustainability issues, take informed action, and contribute to more just and ecologically thriving communities. The article argued that this fusion of environmental education into English classrooms establishes personal relevance for diverse learners, stimulating critical thinking and creativity. Ultimately, this integrative pedagogy aims to nurture globe-minded citizens ready to collectively build sustainable futures.

It can also be concluded that through this proposed framework, environmental education in ELT transcends the traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary acquisition. It transforms English language classrooms into dynamic spaces where students develop their linguistic skills while engaging critically with pressing sustainability challenges.

The integration of environmental themes, as discussed in this paper, is underpinned by the tenets of critical pedagogy. This approach aims to connect classroom learning to broader social contexts and real-world issues that hold relevance for students' lives. Environmental sustainability represents one such vital issue, with wide-ranging ecological, economic, and social implications. Adopting a critical pedagogical lens also empowers students to not just hone their English proficiency but also to deeply analyze the root causes of environmental crises, question assumptions, weigh trade-offs, and determine thoughtful solutions towards more sustainable societies. Learners develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities alongside communication skills. The specific strategies outlined, from eco-themed readings to project-based learning, are designed to organically interweave language and content learning. Students expand their vocabulary and grammar mastery while engaging with meaningful topics like climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development. These lessons capture imagination, spur dialogue, inspire advocacy, and nurture holistic learning. Students evolve into sustainability changemakers, ready to contribute towards systemic transformations through their voices and actions.

Ultimately, environmental education in ELT cultivates global citizens - individuals equipped with the knowledge, tools, and determination to collectively build just, equitable, and ecologically thriving communities. It marries language competency with socio-environmental awareness. The integrative approaches discussed illuminate a path forward for English language teaching. This paradigm views proficient communication skills not in isolation, but as part of a broader commitment to foster active, engaged, and responsible contributors to sustainable futures.

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